UNDERSTANDING COMING OUT ISSUES FOR LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL & TRANSGENDER STUDENTS

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Convening for Student Success
Overview

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- That’s Gay Quiz
- Group Think I
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- Coming Out Strategies
- Group Think II
- Student Narratives
- Identity Intersection
- Group Think III
- What Does This Mean?
- Resources
THAT’S GAY QUIZ
Group Think I

WHAT ARE SOME ISSUES THAT CAN AFFECT A STUDENT’S DECISION TO COME OUT?
At a Glance

Difficulties

- Religious Beliefs
- Family Acceptance
- Cultural Background
- Generational Beliefs
- Feeling unsafe or bullied by peers
- Feelings of Isolation
- Lack of Supportive Resources
- Living a Double Life
- Financial Consequences
At a Glance

Transgender Student Difficulties

- Application Process
- Housing
- Accommodations
- Name Change (i.e., class roster, ID card)
- Gender Neutral Bathrooms
- Trans-Friendly Physicians
- Finding a Community
- Isolation
- Coming out in a different way
Anti-LGBT Bullying

- The National School Climate Survey, conducted in 2005 by the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN), concluded that three-quarters of the high school students surveyed heard derogatory and homophobic remarks “frequently” or “often” at school, and 90 percent heard the term “gay” used generally to imply someone is stupid or something is worthless.

- In a poll conducted in 2005 by Harris Interactive and GLSEN, 60 percent of students (aged 13-18) had been verbally or physically harassed or assaulted during the past school year because of real or “perceived race/ethnicity, disability, gender, sexual orientation, gender expression, or religion” (p. 4). Over half of these incidences were thought to be based on sexual orientation alone.
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COMING OUT STARS
Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth are up to four times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual peers (Massachusetts 2006 Youth Risk Survey).

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth who come from a rejecting family are up to nine times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual peers (2007 San Francisco State University Chavez Center Institute).
Tips for When Someone Comes Out to You

- Be patient
- Commit yourself as an ally. Let them know you are supportive
- Don’t push or force someone to disclose anything to you
- Keep their confidence and respect their privacy
- Acknowledge the risk they took telling you
- Thank them for trusting you
- Say that it will not change how you feel for them or admit there may be some positive changes
- Don’t over-react
- If comfortable, offer a hug of support
- Ask if there is anything you can do
Don’t Ask:

- Are you hot for me?
- Who did this to you?
- Is this just a phase?
- Do you have AIDS?
- Where you molested?
Tips for When Someone Comes Out

- Be patient with yourself
- Start small. It could be easier to tell friends rather than family
- Find allies in your family i.e., brother, cousin, aunt
- Develop a support network of friends who are accepting and supportive
- Be positive
- Find resources or get a mentor to talk to

- Don’t come out in anger or retaliation
- Be patient with others. Realize that they may need some time to adjust.
- Be firm with how you identify
- Assess your identity
- Be prepared for different types or reactions
- Research resources
WHY DO LGBT STUDENTS WANT TO COME OUT?
STUDENT NARRATIVES
Identity Intersection

- Dissertation: CONCEPT MAPPING AND DESCRIBING THE SOURCES OF IMPACT ON BLACK GAY COLLEGE STUDENT IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT AT 4-YEAR INSTITUTIONS

- 69 participants (22 provided additional critical incidents)
- 101 critical incidents
- Top 2 Themes:
  - Having a direct experience with discrimination based on sexual orientation and/or race (16)
  - Coming out to self (11)
Identity Intersection

- What that incident or experience was,
- If another person or persons were involved in this incident or experience, describe them and their relationship to you, and
- What do you think was important about this experience or incident, and why?
- What you believe the long-term effect to have been on your sense of who you are?

- Year in School incident occurred
- Degree to which you experienced this incident or experience as positive (1-7)
- The eventual effect this incident or experience had on your sense of yourself (1-7)
Having a direct experience with discrimination based on sexual orientation and/or race

“My SHADES (lgbt people of color) support organization that I started at Ohio University hosts the National Day of Silence every year, and I sent out a mass email informing the school of the event, we received a lot of support, but I personally receive a good number of negative emails in response. I was called a faggot and a nigger in one of these, I traced the email back and found out that it came from a person who I speak to from time to time since we lived on the same floor in our dorm. It was at this point that it really hit me, I have already grown up having to deal with racially discriminatory issues and now another layer of prejudice was being added to my sweet cake of life. For a short while I felt I was all alone once again like I felt when I first came to realize my sexual orientation, but I got over it and it motivated me to reach out, teach and open the eyes of close minded individuals with my positive attitude and involvement on campus.”

Year: Freshman, Institution: Ohio University
Positivity: 2, Impact: 6
Having a direct experience with discrimination based on sexual orientation and/or race

“I went to a black party on campus with some friends. I really didn’t know any of the people there because I am not really involved with the campus black community, but I soon realized why. Everyone was staring at me and some of the guys were laughing after making some comments. I didn’t know what was their problem, but my only guess is because I am openly gay on campus. “

Year: Junior, Institution: University of Southern California
Positivity: 1, Impact: 2
Coming Out to Self

“I first realized that I had to live my life for me it had become overwhelmingly evident that I was not into women. I decided one night after coming back from my home town where my girlfriend was still residing that I would no longer subject her to my unhappiness. She was never perfect in my eyes. It hit me over the head that she was not for me simply because she was a female. I loved her, not as my companion, but as a friend. I was intimate with her only because I felt obligated to be intimate with her. She did not appeal to me the way that the guys did that I noticed on campus. That night, when I decided to break up with her and discontinue my need to satisfy my family and my mother, was the night that I believe opened me up to possibility that I could be happy and free to be me.”

Year: Sophomore, Institution: University of Southern Mississippi
Positivity: 4, Impact: 6
Group Think III

Would similar experiences exist for native students when coming out? Why? Why not?
Historical Context

Some native people/tribes/nations, not all, maintained respect for some people who western culture would deem are playing with gender roles or sexuality.

- “Two Spirit” People
  - spiritual leaders
  - healers, sacred
  - androgynuous
  - mixed gender roles

- Brian Joseph Gilly (2006), male berdachism “was a fundamental institution among most tribal peoples.”

- Will Roscoe (1991) writes that male and female berdaches have been “documented in over 130 tribes, in every region of North America, among every type of native culture.”
“Winktes” (Sioux and Lakota)

“Winktes at one time were regarded as sacred, but that has declined...Younger people call other youngsters winkte but I don’t think they are really winktes because they have no spirituality. They are just gay; there’s a difference...”

What does this mean?

- Coming out experiences are unique
- Cultural backgrounds, tribe affiliations, religious beliefs, ethnicity, etc. may affect coming out
- Intersecting identities are not easy to navigate or negotiate during coming out
- There is no correct or incorrect way, time, place, etc. to come out
- Support networks can help
- Intolerance or hatred are not going anywhere
In memory of Fred Martinez (June 16, 2001), a student at Montezuma-Cortez High School in Cortez, Colorado

Fred Martinez was nádleehi (pronounced NOD-lay), a male-bodied person with a spiritual essence that is feminine, a special gift according to his ancient Navajo culture.

Savagely beaten body was found five days later in a shallow canyon near his home.

“Two-Spirits: Sexuality, Gender, and the Murder of Fred Martinez,” www.twospirits.org
Harsh Reality

- In memory of Lawrence King (February 12, 2008), a 15-year-old student at E.O. Green Junior High School in Oxnard, California.

- He was shot twice by fellow student, 14-year-old Brandon McInerney, and was kept on life support until he died two days later.

- By the third grade, King began to be bullied by his fellow students due to his effeminacy and openness about being gay, having come out at ten years old.
How can I help?

- Become an Ally

An Ally is a person who is a member of the dominant or majority group who works to end oppression in his or her private and professional life through support of, and as an advocate for the oppressed population.

- Through:
  - Awareness
  - Knowledge
  - Education
  - Skills
  - Action
Resources

- Gay Lesbian Straight Educators Network (GLSEN), [www.glsen.org](http://www.glsen.org)
- Lambda Legal, [www.lambdalegal.org](http://www.lambdalegal.org)
- USC LGBT Resource Center, [www.usc.edu/lgbt](http://www.usc.edu/lgbt)
- Native Out, [www.nativeout.com](http://www.nativeout.com)
- New Mexico GLBTQ Centers, [www.gaynewmexico.org](http://www.gaynewmexico.org)
- Parents and Friends of Lesbians And Gays (PFLAG), [www.plflag.org](http://www.plflag.org)
- Transgender Law Center, [www.transgenderlawcenter.org](http://www.transgenderlawcenter.org)
- Trevor Project, [www.trevorproject.org](http://www.trevorproject.org)
  - Hotline: 866-4-U-TREVOR
References

- Vigil, V. (2007). Concept Mapping and describing the sources of impact for black gay college men at 4 year institutions.