

Diversity

Topic: **Gay, Lesbian, Bi-Sexual, Transgendered, Questioning Students**

Compiled

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Introduction: In contemporary classrooms, faculty may encounter a variety of GLBTQ students and those who love them. As an out gay graduate assistant, I have faced the following:

- an 18-year-old freshman male who wore makeup and polka-dot toenail polish to class;
- a 21-year-old junior female who confessed after class that she was an out lesbian, played hockey with “the guys,” and was both bipolar and refusing psychotropic medications;
- a 20-year-old fraternity president who outted himself during a class discussion regarding outrageous paparazzi behavior; and,
- a 21-year-old senior (and minister’s daughter) who was unprepared for the reality that her boyfriend was living on the “down low.”

These situations, and scores of others, can challenge faculty in ways for which they have little or no training. And while this handout makes no attempt to be comprehensive, it is a beginning point for those interested in learning about handling GLBTQ students with finesse.

Coming Out

Facts and Tips:

Many GLBTQ people struggle with their personal and sexual identities and how those identities may, and may not, comport with societal, familial, governmental, or even religious traditions, expectations, and canons. Consider becoming an ally in the GLBTQ community. If a student comes out to you -- or is already out but needs support -- understand that the student is expressing a level of comfort with and trust in you. Below are some suggestions that have been adapted from the University of North Carolina and the University of Minnesota-Deluth.

- Thank your student for having the courage to tell you.
- Don’t judge your student. If you have strong religious or other beliefs about homosexuality, keep them to yourself for now.
- Respect your student’s confidentiality. The student may not be ready to come out to everyone.
- Tell your student that you still care about all your students, no matter what their identity or sexual orientation.

- Treat your student the way you always have in the past. The main fear for many people coming out is ostracism.
- Ask any questions you may have, but understand that your student may have more questions than answers. Become familiar with *local and campus* resources that may help your student to deal with challenges and opportunities related to identity or sexual orientation.
- Include your student’s partner in plans as much as you would any other student. This can be very affirming for graduate students who often interact with faculty outside the classroom.
- Talk to your GLBTQ student about other GLBTQ people you know. But, don’t assume that all GLBTQ people know one another just because the community may be small.

Other Useful Facts

- There are an estimated 8.8 million gay, lesbian, and bisexual) persons in the U.S. (2005 American Community Survey)
- Both longitudinal and cross-sectional research found that same-sex couples are as committed to and satisfied with their relationships as heterosexual couples. (*Journal of Developmental Psychology*, Jan. 2008)
- Researchers in the studies referenced above found that same-sex couples not in civil unions were more likely to end their relationships than same-sex couples in civil unions or married heterosexual couples. This suggests that the protections offered by legalized relationship recognition may have an important impact on same-sex couples.
- According to one study, gay and lesbian youth are two to three times more likely to commit suicide than other youths and 30% of all completed youth suicides are related to the issue of sexual identity. (Gibson, 1989)
- 45% of gay males and 20% of lesbians surveyed reported having experienced verbal harassment and or physical violence during high school as a result of their sexual orientation. (National Anti-Gay/Lesbian Victimization Report)
- More than one-third (36%) of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) undergraduate students have experienced harassment within the past year (Rankin, 2003).
- In a study of depression and gay youth, researchers found depression strikes homosexual youth four to five times more severely than other non-gay peers. (Hammelman. T.L., 1990)
- HIV infection and other sexually transmitted diseases and infections are on the increase, especially in communities of color. (U.S. Centers for Disease Control) Prevention is far easier than treatment.
- More than 40 published, small-sample studies find nearly unanimously that same-sex couples do as good a job as any other type of family in raising healthy children. (*Sacramento Bee*, June 19, 2008)
- There were 3,534 reported incidents of domestic violence affecting LGBT individuals in 2006, a slight decrease (-15%) over incidents reported by National Coalition of Anti-violence Program members in 2005.

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Helpful

- Web Sites: To further educate yourself, consider the following resources
- www.forthetbibletellsmeso.org/ -- visit this site and/or watch the documentary film and recommend it to others struggling with Christian religion-related matters tied to GLBTQ people
 - http://www.pointfoundation.org/faq_general.html -- visit this site for information about scholarships, mentorship, leadership training and hope for students who have been marginalized because of their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression
 - <http://www.hrc.org/> -- visit this site for America’s largest gay and lesbian organization
 - www.hrc.org/documents/resource_guide.pdf - 2008-01-18 -- visit this site for information on coming out in communities of color
 - <http://www.gillfoundation.org/> -- visit this site for information about one of the nation's largest private foundations focused on GLBTQ civil rights
 - <http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/14753.html> -- visit this site for information from the American Medical Association about its policies and initiatives related to GLBTQ people
 - <http://www.avp.org/> -- visit New York City’s gay and lesbian anti-violence organization to learn more about how LGBTQ people can be targets of hate crimes and what can be done about it

Other Web Sources for Research, Background Information

(credit: Human Rights Campaign)

- BridgeBuilders -- www.bridge-builders.org.
- The Institute for Gay and Lesbian Strategic Studies -- www.iglss.org.
- National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute -- www.thetaskforce.org/our_work/policy_institute.
- Responsive Classroom, Northeast Foundation for Children Inc. -- www.responsiveclassroom.org.
- Rethinking Schools -- www.rethinkingschools.org.
- Wellesley Centers for Women -- www.wcwonline.org.
- Williams Institute on Sexual Orientation Law and Public Policy, UCLA School of Law -- www.law.ucla.edu/williamsproj/home.html.
- ADL: A World of Difference Institute Recommended Multicultural and Anti-Bias Books for Children -- www.adl.org/bibliography/default.asp.
- Cooperative Children’s Books Center, University of Wisconsin -- www.education.wisc.edu/ccbc.
- Culture for Kids -- www.cultureforkids.com.
- EdChange: Professional Development, Scholarship and Activism for Diversity, Social Justice and Community Growth -- www.edchange.org.
- GLSEN Booklink – www.glsen.org/cgi_bin/iowa/all/booklink/index.html.
- Syracuse Cultural Workers: Tools for Change. www.syr culturalworkers.com.

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- Tapestry Books. www.tapestrybooks.com.
- Teaching for Change. www.teachingforchange.org.
- Two Lives Publishers. www.twolives.com.

Citations: Gibson, P. (1989). "Gay Male and Lesbian Youth Suicide" In M. Feineib (Ed), *Prevention in Youth Suicide*. (Report Task Force on Youth Suicide, 3. Band, S. 110..44) Washington, D.C.: US Department of Health and Human Services.

Rankin, S.R. (2003). *Campus Climate for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender People: A National Perspective*. New York: The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute.

Please reference other sources informally cited throughout this handout.