

One in Ten:

Understanding the Needs of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Students and Staff

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Presented by:

*Don Stenta, Coordinator
Student Organization Services
Office of Student Activities*

Student Organization Services
Office of Student Activities
218 Ohio Union
1739 North High Street
Columbus, OH 43210
614-292-8763 PHONE
614-292-6061 FAX

For further information assistance and
referral, contact:

Scott Boden, Coordinator

Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Student Services
Student Gender and Sexuality Services
464 Ohio Union
1739 North High Street
Columbus, OH 43210

614-292-6200

glbss@osu.edu

Definitions to know and understand

Homophobia – the fear and hatred of those who love and sexually desire those of the same gender. Homophobia, which has its roots in sexism, includes prejudice, discrimination, harassment, and acts of violence brought on by that fear and hatred.

Heterosexism – the system of advantages bestowed on heterosexuals. It is the institutional response to homophobia that assumes that all people are or should be heterosexual and therefore excludes the needs, concerns, and life experiences of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexuals.

Coming Out – the process, often life-long, in which a person accepts, and in many cases appreciates his or her Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, or Transgender identity. This often involves the sharing of this information with others.

Heterosexual Ally – a heterosexual person who supports and honors sexual diversity, acts accordingly to interrupt and challenge homophobic and heterosexist remarks and actions of others, and is willing to explore these forms of bias within himself or herself.

Source:

Blumfield, Warren J. (1992). *Homophobia: How We All Pay the Price*. Boston: Beacon Press.

QUALITIES OF AN ALLY

An Ally:

1. Has worked to develop an understanding of Homosexuality and the needs of Gays and Lesbians.
2. Chooses to align with Lesbians and Gays and responds to their needs.
3. Believes that it is in her/his self-interest to be an ally.
4. Is committed to the personal growth (in spite of the probability of discomfort and possible pain) required.
5. Is quick to take pride in personal success in responding to Homophobia and overcoming fears.
6. Expects support from other allies.
7. Is able to acknowledge and articulate how patterns of fear have operated in their lives.
8. Expects to make some mistakes but does not use it as an excuse for non-action.
9. Knows that both sides of an ally relationship have a clear responsibility for their own response to the oppression whether or not persons on the other side choose to respond.
10. Knows that in the most empowered ally relationships, the persons in the non-oppressed role initiate the change toward personal, institutional, and societal justice and equality.
11. Knows that he/she is responsible for humanizing or empowering their role in society, particularly as their role relates to responding to Homophobia.
12. Promotes a sense of community with Lesbians and Gays and teaches others about the importance of outreach.
13. Has a good sense of humor.

HOMOPHOBIA

In the clinical sense, homophobia is defined as an intense, irrational fear of same sex relationships that become overwhelming to the person. In common usage, homophobia is the fear of intimate relationships with persons of the same sex.

Below are listed 4 negative homophobic, and 4 positive levels of attitudes toward Gay and Lesbian relationships/people. They were developed by Dr. Dorothy Riddle, a psychologist from Tucson, Arizona.

HOMOPHOBIC LEVELS OF ATTITUDE:

- Repulsion - Homosexuality is seen as a "crime against nature". Gays are sick, crazy, immoral, sinful, wicked, etc., and anything is justified to change them (e.g., prison, hospitalization, negative behavior therapy including electric shock).
- Pity - Heterosexual 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" should be pitied, "the poor dears".
- Tolerance - Homosexuality is just a phase of adolescent development that many people go through and most people "grow out of". Thus, Gays are less mature than straights and should be treated with the protectiveness and indulgence one uses with a child. Gays 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 a 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."
- Denies social and legal realities. 84% of people believe being gay is obscene and vulgar and 70% still believe it is wrong even between consenting adults.
- Ignores the pain of invisibility and stress of closet behavior. "Flaunt" usually means say or do anything that makes people aware.

POSITIVE LEVELS OF ATTITUDE:

- Support - Basic ACLU approach. Work to safeguard the rights of Gays and Lesbians. Such people may be uncomfortable themselves, but they 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 Gays as a valid part of that diversity. These people are willing to combat homophobia in themselves and in others.
- Nurturance - Assume that Gay and Lesbian people are indispensable in our society. They view gays with genuine affection and delight and are willing to be Gay advocates.

Developing a nonhomophobic atmosphere

1. Regular inservice training/seminars on gay/lesbian/bisexual issues
2. Regular discussions at staff meetings and faculty meetings about g/l/b issues
3. Develop an updated library/resource area of books, articles, periodicals, etc.
4. Refuse to tolerate homophobic attitudes, remarks/actions
5. Develop gay-sensitive language
 - don't assume heterosexuality
 - avoid using pronouns that assume the sex of the partner/friend
 - use inclusive examples that specifically use gay/lesbian issues
 - use the terms partner/lover instead of spouse/wife/husband/boyfriend, etc.
6. Post/have available updated listings of groups/activities/programs/services around gay/lesbian/bisexual issues

COMING OUT MODELS OF DEVELOPMENT

Assumptions:

- ** personal identity develops along an interactive process between the individual and his/her environment
- ** models share the basic assumption that humans move through life experiences within a particular framework
- ** we can understand the process an individual is experiencing and can predict what form future stages might take.
- ** an awareness of stages allows individuals to gauge their relation to others who have had similar experiences.
- ** societal attitudes are important in affecting the development of a person's positive identity.

COMING OUT MODELS OF DEVELOPMENT

Limitations:

- ** models predict general patterns
- ** each person comes out in different ways and under unique circumstances.
- ** some people never truly complete the process -- some become stuck or retreat back to earlier stages of the process
- ** men and women tend to differ slightly at points within the process

COMING OUT MODELS OF DEVELOPMENT

Vivienne Cass proposes a coming out model with six interconnecting stages.

Stage 1: Identity Confusion

This is the "Who am I?" stage associated with the feeling that one is different from peers, accompanied by a growing sense of personal alienation. The person begins to be conscious of same-sex feelings or behaviors and is able to label them as such. The person usually does not disclose inner turmoil to others.

Stage 2: Identity Comparison

This is the rationalization or bargaining stage where the person thinks, "I may be gay, but then again I may be bisexual," "Maybe this is just temporary," or "My feelings of attraction are simply for just one other person of my own sex and this is a special case." There is a heightened sense of not belonging anywhere and a feeling that "I am the only one in the world like this."

Stage 3: Identity Tolerance

In this stage, the person begins to contact other lesbian, gay, or bisexual people to counteract feelings of isolation and alienation, but merely tolerates rather than fully accepting a gay identity. The feeling of not belonging with heterosexual people becomes stronger.

Stage 4: Identity Acceptance

There is continued and increased contact with other lesbian, gay, or bisexual people in this stage, where friendships start to form. The individual thus evaluates other lesbian, gay, or bisexual people more positively and accepts rather than tolerates a gay self-image. The earlier questions of "Who am I?" and "Where do I belong?" have been answered.

Stage 5: Identity Pride

This is the "These are my people" stage where the person develops an awareness of the enormous incongruity that exists between the person's own increasingly positive concept of themselves as a lesbian, gay, or bisexual person and an awareness of society's rejection of this lifestyle. The person feels anger at heterosexuals and devalues many of their institutions (marriage, gender-role structures, etc.). The person discloses her or his identity to more and more people and wishes to be immersed in the lesbian, gay, and bisexual subculture consuming its literature, art, and other forms of culture.

Stage 6: Identity Synthesis

The intense anger at heterosexuals -- the "them and us" attitude that existed in stage 5 -- softens at this stage to reflect a recognition that some heterosexuals are supportive and can be trusted. However, those who are not supportive are further devalued. There remains some anger in the ways that lesbians and gays are treated in society, but this is less intense. The person retains a deep sense of pride.

COMING OUT MODELS OF DEVELOPMENT

Eli Coleman (1981) proposes a second model to chart the coming out process using five stages. Unlike the Cass version, this model focuses in its later stages on the formation of romantic attachments.

Stage 1: Pre-Coming-Out

At this stage, the individual is not conscious of same-sex feelings because of the strong defenses built up to keep such unwanted self-knowledge from reaching a conscious level. The person does feel, however, somehow different from others but does not understand the reasons for this.

Stage 2: Coming-Out

At this stage, the person comes to a conscious or semi-conscious acknowledgment of having lesbian, gay, or bisexual thoughts or fantasies. During this period of great personal confusion, the person may disclose feelings to one or a few trusted individuals for external validation. Some people may begin to make contacts with other individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual and may avoid telling close friends, who are presumably heterosexual, and family members who may reject them.

Stage 3: Exploration

During this stage, the person interacts more with lesbian, gay, or bisexual people and "experiments" with a new sexual identity. The person often develops improved interpersonal skills which may result in a more positive self-image. Many people with a lesbian, gay, or bisexual lifestyle enter this stage during adolescence.

Stage 4: First Relationship

Following the period of sexual experimentation of Stage 3, the person may desire a more stable and committed relationship which combines emotional and physical attraction. These relationships often do not last because they are frequently entered into before the basic tasks of coming-out and sexual exploration are completed.

Stage 5: Integration

This stage, where the public and private identities merge into one unified and integrated self-image, is ongoing and will last for the rest of the person's life. Relationships are often characterized by honesty and mutual trust and can be more successful than first relationships. The person is better equipped to meet the problems and pressures of everyday life.