



Education Department Resource

## One Umbrella, Many People

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### Diversity Within the LGBT Communities

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people are often grouped together because they are all targets of similar forms of discrimination (usually based on with the way they love and express their gender). Within these communities, however, there is a tremendous diversity of experience. The passages below provide just a brief explanation of some of the differences found within the LGBT communities. They serve as a reminder that there is not one way of “being gay,” and will hopefully encourage you to learn more about LGBT people from different backgrounds.

#### **The Gender Continuum**

In our society we have been trained to think of gender as a magnet, with two opposite poles (male and female) that attract. This view has no basis either in science or in our practical experience. The existence of lesbian, gay and bisexual people throughout history and across cultures shows that opposites don’t always attract. And the existence of transgender, transsexual and intersexual people demonstrate that biological sex and gender is more of a broad spectrum with many points than a bar with two poles.

- **Transgender People:** Transgender is a broad term for all people who do not identify with or choose not to conform to the gender roles assigned to them by society based on their biological sex—in other words males who do not look, act or feel what society calls “masculine” and females who do not look, act or feel what society calls “feminine.” Transsexuals, cross-dressers, and drag queens/kings are just some of the many types of people who fit under the transgender umbrella. Some transgender people identify as male or female, some identify with a host of other labels, and still others reject gender labels all together. When referring to a transgender person, use the pronoun they have chosen for themselves (some use gender neutral pronouns such as *zi* instead of she or he) or the one that is consistent with their presentation of themselves.

It is a common misperception that transgender people “wish they were the opposite sex.” While this is true for some, most transgender people are perfectly comfortable with their bodies and their sex—for instance, most drag queens (men who present themselves as women) have no desire to be biologically female. It is also common for people to confuse sexual orientation with gender identity/expression. Just as most gay men have no desire to be women and most lesbians do not wish to be men, not all transgender people are homosexual. In fact many are very much heterosexual. It is therefore important to keep discussions of sexual orientation and gender identity separate, and to avoid lumping different types of identities into one queer pot.

- **Transsexual People:** Transsexuals do not feel as though their birth-biological sex matches their innermost sense of themselves as male/masculine or female/feminine. We have all heard the cliché, “man trapped in a woman’s body” or vice versa. For transsexual people, there is a strong need to bring their physical sex (hormones, genitals, and other sex characteristics) into alignment with who they know they are inside. Some transsexual people change their bodies through

hormones and/or sex reassignment surgery. Others choose not to or cannot for medical or financial reasons.

Though transgender is a relatively modern term and way of identifying, people have always existed who did not fit society's gender expectations. Did you know that...

- Joan of Arc was a warrior who was burned in 1431 for dressing and acting like a man?
- In 1654, Queen Christina of Sweden abdicated her throne and adopted a male name and garb?
- We'wha (WAY-wah), a Zuni "man-woman," served as cultural ambassador for her people in a visit to President Cleveland in 1886?
- Jazz legend Billy Tipton was born female but lived as a man until his death in 1989?
- Tennis great Renee Richards underwent sex reassignment surgery in the 1970s and brought transsexual rights into the national consciousness?

- **Intersexual People:** Most of us have been trained to believe that there are only two sexes—male and female. Medically speaking, however, there are at least five and probably more. At least one in 2,000 children are *intersex*, born with chromosomes, hormones, genitalia and/or other sex characteristics that are not exclusively male or female as defined by the medical establishment in our society. For instance, some children are born with an enlarged clitoris that looks like a penis; some are born with a penis, but may develop hips and breasts during adolescence due to hormone levels. In most cases, these children are at no medical risk. Regardless, most are assigned a sex (male or female) by their doctors and/or families and may undergo cosmetic surgery on their sex organs so that they fit society's idea of "normal." These procedures sometimes damage the child's reproductive organs and can emotionally scar them by forcing on them a gender and/or sex role that may not feel natural. Rather than forcing children into boxes that they were never meant to fit, it is important that the medical community learns to accept the gender spectrum that exists naturally in our world, and allows individuals to grow into and define their own gender and sexual identities without interference from society.

### Questioning People

Often you will see a 'Q' tacked on to the end of 'LGBT.' Sometimes the 'Q' stands for queer, a word that has been reclaimed as a positive term to describe those who do not conform to rigid ideas about gender and sexuality. 'Q' also means questioning and refers to people who are uncertain as to their sexual orientation or gender identity. While many people are certain of their sexual/gender identities from an early age, others need time to explore a variety of relationships and learn more about themselves before they can be sure. This period of exploration is a normal and healthy phase of maturation. Questioning people may need information and support free of judgment during this stage of their identity development.

### Children of LGBT Parents

As we work toward greater acceptance of LGBT people, it is important that we consider the children who are being raised by LGBT parents and family members. An estimated 6 to 14 million children have a gay or lesbian parent, and between 8 and 10 million children are being raised in gay and lesbian headed households. These children are often subject to the same taunts and stereotypes as LGBT people, and their families are often denied legal rights including marriage and adoption (despite study after study showing that they are just as healthy as children raised by straight parents). Many straight children of LGBT parents report that they identify as "queer" because of their connection to their

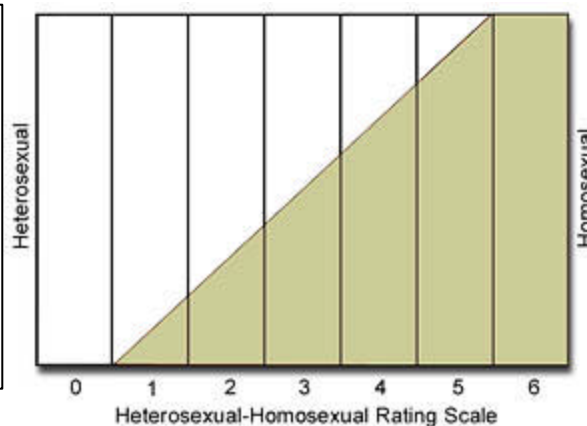
families and the bias they have experienced throughout their childhoods. Affirming all types of family structures (and the people in them) is therefore an important part of any effort to reduce prejudice.

### Bisexual People

*Bisexual* people are sexually and/or emotionally attracted to more than one sex. Because our society tends to categorize people in narrow boxes (man or woman, gay or straight), bisexuality is a subject that makes some people—LGBT and straight—uncomfortable, and that has many stereotypes attached to it. A common misunderstanding is that bisexual people are confused about their sexuality or not ready to accept being gay or lesbian. While this is true for some people, most bisexual people are clear and comfortable about their identity. Most bisexual people aren't interested in dating men and women at the same time, and are just as likely as anyone else to form monogamous relationships. Many bisexual people describe themselves as falling in love with people rather than genders, and find their attractions to be fluid rather than fixed in one place along the sexuality continuum.

Did you know that a landmark 1948 study by Alfred Kinsey, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, found that most men are neither exclusively heterosexual nor homosexual, but exist along a 7-point continuum (see right)? According to the study...

- 60% of all men had some type of homosexual relationship before they were 16 years old.
- 30% of all men had some type of homosexual relationship between the ages of 20 and 24.



### Harassment Against Lesbians and Bisexual Women

Because we live in a male dominated world, the unique experiences and perspectives of women are often overlooked. With regard to anti-LGBT bias, the unique ways in which young women are targeted for harassment are not adequately discussed or disentangled from the way in which young men experience bias. Since the majority of all girls, regardless of sexual orientation, experience regular sexual harassment in their schools, anti-LGBT harassment faced by lesbian and bisexual females is made worse by the simple act of being female. Young lesbians do not experience sexism and homophobia as separate events; instead, the two forms of harassment reinforce one another. It is unacceptable, according to the unspoken rules of social behavior, for girls to reject boys, present themselves as less than “feminine,” or “compete” with boys for the attention of other girls. Girls who don't play by the rules are often punished by boys and other (heterosexual) girls intolerant of sexual and gender nonconformity. A 2000 study of harassment showed that lesbian and bisexual girls are targeted for even more, and more violent, sexual harassment than heterosexual girls in every category—from being called “sexually offensive names” (72% vs. 63%) to being “touched, brushed up against, or cornered in a sexual way” (63% vs. 52%) and from being “grabbed” or “having their clothes pulled in a sexual way” (50% vs. 44%) to being the victims of attempted rape or rape (23% vs. 6%). Such sexual harassment (layered with homophobic violence) is often downplayed by authority figures, who say that “boys will be boys” or that such behavior is “harmless” and a “normal, natural” part of growing up male and female. Many young lesbians even report that they cannot always count on their gay male peers for support. It is therefore important that we expand our definition of anti-LGBT harassment to recognize the ways in which it plays on sexism in the lives of girls. We must make it clear that harassment against

girls is not “natural” and take every opportunity to intervene and educate others so that all students can enjoy a quality education, free from fear and intimidation.

### **LGBT People of Color**

Just as the perspectives of LGBT women often play a subordinate role to those of men, the experiences of LGBT people of color are often overshadowed by those of White people in our society. LGBT people exist, of course, in every culture and race, and many communities of color have rich LGBT histories and traditions. Cultural pluralism in the United States combined with a long history of racism has resulted in an LGBT experience for people of color that is distinct from White culture, and tinged with unique joys and difficulties. Many LGBT people from non-White races and ethnicities benefit from a tight knit queer community within their larger cultural community. Some feel a sense of protectedness within their racial/ethnic groups (though not always acceptance) from the discrimination of the larger society. For many, however, being LGBT and a person of color brings great challenges. Young LGBT people of color often have to deal with racial stigma at the same they are struggling to accept their sexual orientation or gender identity. Managing dual systems of prejudice and trying to integrate multiple identities at once can be stressful. In addition, many LGBT people of color are forced to defend against the stereotype that LGBT people don't naturally exist within their racial or ethnic groups, and that Western or White influence is to blame for their identities. They are sometimes seen as “traitors to their race” or an obstruction in the pursuit of racial equality. This lack of acceptance is often reinforced by religious institutions, family expectations, and cultural traditions around gender and sexuality. The passages that follow capture some of the experiences of LGBT people who come from communities of color.

## Eres Maricon? Por “Eladio”

They never understood. Never had and never will.

How hard it was to grow up *una mujer* in this *cuerpo* de hombre (a woman trapped in this man’s body).

A deep dark secret kept safely hidden in a place where no light of day could penetrate the wall of sadness that enveloped what I wanted to be. More important, what I was really meant to be.

Why is it that they say your family is the one thing that can never let you down?

And yet, with family like mine, god knows I would never want for enemies. The many occasions of supposed family togetherness, the men camping outside in the *jardin* (garden), the women in *la cocina* or *el salon* (the kitchen or the living room). Many times I wished that I could join *la familia femininas* (the females of the family) instead of the machismo men that I was expected to be a part of. No one would ever comprehend how much I despised watching the males of *mi familia* strut around talking about who had done what with whom, as if the extramarital affairs they had made them even bigger men in their minds. Watching them attack one another, first with drunken words, then with their fists; such brutality made me sick. My face kept the same blank look on the surface, never revealing the storm of rage and repulsion that course through my veins. Repeating over and over inside, “*soy hombre, no soy maricone*” (I’m a man, not a faggot).

Being a forced participant to this machismo group, I literally found myself on the outside looking in. *Mi primas* (my cousins) all pretending to be mommies, or combing the long manes of *pelo de Negro, o pelo de Moreno* (shades of black and brown hair color) into the latest fashion craze. How I envied their freedom, their ability to express love, care compassion, and nurturing amongst themselves. These were emotions of *las mujeres* (the women or women). I would hear the *tias* (aunts) talking in conspiratorial whispers of the ups and downs of their soap opera lives. I cried a million tears of sadness inside, and yet the expression on my face betrayed nothing. Not even me.

As I grew older, the same questions would be asked repeatedly. At first the questions were of the *bueno hombre salud* (good ‘ol boy salute), slapping my back, sly facial expressions, and lewd comments about when and if the BIG EVENT had occurred for me. Who was the lucky *senorita* (girl or lady)? If you only knew, I thought bleakly inside. Outside, I blustered and laughed their prying comments off. But as quickly as the humor surfaced, with time it was replaced with looks of hatred and disgust, accusations flying against me fast and furious. The questions then changed to, “*Eres Maricon? Mande? Eres Maricon*” (Are you a faggot? Huh, what did you say? Are you a faggot?). Inside I screamed, “Yes damn it, *soy Maricon!*” but the outside was none the wiser. I would hear my voice betray myself, “Hell no—*no soy Maricon...*”

(from Michele Garrett in *Troubling Intersections of Race and Sexuality*; Kevin Kumashiro, ed., Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.; 2001.)

## Chosen

...It was the creator who gave each [person] a spirit, either male or female...The Great Spirit decided to bless a few special people with two spirits, rather than one, one of each contained within shapes of flesh and blood. Thus it is, as was meant to be, that I have been chosen—from among the many—to know the love and joy, sorrow and pain of being a Two-Spirit.

It was, sorrowfully, with the arrival of the interloper from across the great salt-water lake that many of the original inhabitants of Turtle Island have forgotten the rich legacy and proud heritage of the Paired-Spirits...The rulers of First Nation's lands—the pretenders—sought to change what they found.

The expression *Two-Spirit* is known throughout many of the cultures of First Peoples of Turtle Island... In the language of the Lakota, they are known as *Winkte*; among the Cree the word is *Ogokwe*. In the wisdom of the Coast Salish people, they are known as *G'aa-G'aa-K'eemula*. The name carries connotations of feminine and masculine attributes as well as spiritual manifestation and authority. We are simply identified as Man/Woman in some cultures.

My experiences and sharing with Siem Na Sulxwane and the Holy men and woman of our communities have revealed a quiet and gentle understanding and acceptance of me and who I am. The old people of communities remember a time when others like me walked and lived freely among the people. They remembered that we brought wealth and balance to our various communities. And that we carried many of the sacred rites and traditions of a community with us.

Often Two-Spirits were visionaries, soothsayers, healers, dream interpreters, and peacemakers of the tribe. Many Two-Spirits see, smell, taste, hear, and touch things differently than others...Most Two-Spirits honor all things around them as sacred, and their place in this world is to seek bliss...

Of course, this is not always so in the domain of the capitalist/fundamentalist. Often it is the capitalist way to deny or unbalance their spiritual natures with the need to gain riches, to dominate, to place emphasis on the physical and to obtain status...In like manner, individuals who espouse "family values" are frequently fanatical in their efforts to strike out at Two-Spirits born into the broader community.

My family experiences have proven to be a great source of personal and spiritual strength for me. My mom remains steadfastly supportive and loving. And I enjoy the gentle, quiet strength of a younger brother and sister as well as the unconditional love of five nieces who are like daughters to me.

It was so long ago, oh, so very long ago when the creator, X:als, passed this way. So very, very long ago when the song of the drum, reason of the flute, and wisdom of the rattle fashioned the world and all that dwell upon it, above it, and below it. The great Spirit left a mark upon Turtle Island. This was and is known for me and all people that live here and are blessed in one way or another in the image of the spirit. This is the legacy and sagacity of the Two-Spirits who dwell among us.

*(excerpted from Gordon de Frane in Troubling Intersections of Race and Sexuality; Kevin Kumashiro, ed., Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.; 2001.)*

## **Black, Young and Gay in America**

Being Black, young and gay in America can be a very difficult experience, especially when the majority of your “friends” would reject you if they knew the truth...Everyone seems to be on this real thing about whether homosexuality is a curse to Blacks or whether it is an abomination from God. Why do we only see the negative possibilities of homosexuality—why can't they see that not all of us are “punks” and none of us are faggots or any of those demeaning terms that many of us have been submitted to throughout our individual journeys.

To whomever reads this I hope that you realize what we are all going through—whether we are in rural communities or whether we live in urban communities. People at large are not accepting us as much as they are accepting our White counterparts. We have to remember that homosexuality only puts one minority on Whites, whereas we have multiple barriers (minority statuses) that we must confront daily—being Black, being thought of as inferior by some, having less financial persuasion than the majority. Then we have to also face the fact that many of our own people will not accept us because we are too dark, our hair is too nappy, we “talk white,” or we may be gay or have HIV. (Even though we all know the stereotype that there is no such thing as a Black gay man because gay men are not real men. Even though many gay men, Black and White, have been the only male figure in some of our lives, be we gay or straight).

I mention HIV because we don't talk about it and because of that we are dying. Do you realize that among, especially gay men, there is an age gap due to AIDS. HIV has taken ownership of us and now it is time that we took it back. We should not let a preventable disease take control of us. We must be tested and live with the results—I did. December 1, 1997 (World AIDS Day) I found out that I was HIV positive. The result was not the hardest part, but how I was going to continue my daily interactions. No one ever really told me that it could happen to me and for the most part it was a hush-hush thing. No one ever thought to talk to the token kid about sexually transmitted disease (needless to say no one talked about sexuality) because they assumed that I knew better. I did not know better and because of the assumptions I now have a virus that has the potential to kill me...If your family or friends don't want to talk to you about HIV/STDs and your sexuality then find people that will. The only way that we will defeat this thing is by educating ourselves and helping ourselves...I hope that this little testimony opens someone eyes and stops them from being in my situation. Talk.

*(excerpted from St. Louis black gay male; at <http://www.youthresource.com>)*

## A Korean Woman

For too long, I have been afraid of holding identity as a Korean woman, for fear that another Korean would hear and prove me wrong, just by the look of rejection on their faces...

...As I walk through Korean markets and restaurants with my mother, the glares and stares we receive create the separation between me and my community. I am not the one to blame. As I trudge through these spaces with my mother, she is at fault. "That woman married a black man, her daughter is mixed". Sometimes they can figure out my racial background and the stares and the glares become more heated.

My mother has worked long and hard to make me a "respectable Korean". She had me participate in all of the things that her Korean friend's daughters' participated in—violin lessons, piano lessons— "be good at math and science" she says. "You must hold on to your Korean heritage for strength and success, you have my genes, my blood flowing through you. Understand this," she says.

The only understandings of a Korean identity that I held resulted from the combination of distrust from my community, and a vision of an identity given to me by my mother which I did not want to fill... When I told her I was a lesbian, it was one of the only times that she has turned away from me. She didn't understand that I wasn't all of a sudden a freak individual. "How can you be one of those people? How can this be happening to my family?" The words tore through me over and over again. I knew that a lot of the situation came from her fear that being a lesbian was one more strike against me...

It took three months for [my mother] to speak to me again. I had wounded my mother, she was angry at me for doing this to her...Denial and guilt. This was the discipline and this was the punishment. I figure, if my mom had the choice, I would have never told her. I would always explain the girlfriend as a good friend. She would have been happy with that answer. It has been about a year and a half since I came out to my mother. I wasn't prepared for the amount of work it was going to take to open [the] dialogue.

She wanted to read all of the books she could get her hands on about being gay, or being a lesbian. She had known nothing outside of the homophobic talk of her coworkers and my father...and she needed to break down the images to find that there were people behind all of the images of LGBT people she had seen, heard of, talked about. She needed to understand that, even though I was one of "those people," I was still her daughter that she had raised and loved for so long.

My mom still wants me to marry a guy, she wants me to have children with a man, she wants me to have the big wedding. She still prefers that we don't speak about it. She still holds on to hopes of me and a heterosexual future. But just a couple of months ago my mom met my girlfriend. We hung out and ate, and chatted, and my mom was being as charming as ever.

She doesn't want me to endure the hardships she has. I figure if it weren't for the struggle and discomfort I must wade through, my mother would not care if I were blue, purple or green. She says that I hold her strength inside of me, and that makes her feel that I am protected.

*(excerpted from Christina; at <http://www.youthresource.com>)*