

## **Myths About LGBTQ People**

### **I don't know any lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans-identified people.**

You may not know any LGBTQ people who are “out” to you, but you likely do know some. Research suggests that at least 10% of the population is lesbian or gay and a far greater proportion is bisexual. The prevalence of trans-identified people is more difficult to estimate because trans individuals often “pass” as the gender they identify with and do not want to be known as the sex they were assigned at birth.

### **You can “spot” lesbian, gay man, or trans-identified person.**

For the most part, you can only “spot” LGBTQ people if they want to be identified, or if they fit your stereotypes of what LGBTQ people look like. But don't let the stereotypes fool you. There are feminine, masculine and androgynous appearing men who are straight, bisexual trans and gay. There are also feminine, masculine and androgynous appearing women who are straight, bisexual, transgender and lesbian.

### **A disproportionate number of pedophiles and sexual abusers of children are gay, lesbian and bisexual.**

Pedophilia is not linked to sexual orientation. Pedophiles who have gender preferences for children may not have the same gender preferences in their adult attractions (if they have them). Pedophiles' attraction to children has less to do with sexual gratification than it has to do with power. Incidentally, 90% of pedophiles identify as heterosexual men.

### **Being lesbian, gay or bisexual is abnormal.**

The Canadian Psychological and Psychiatric Associations consider the human desire for same sex relationships to be healthy and normal. The American Psychological Association stated that, “it is no more abnormal or sick to be homosexual than to be left-handed.”

### **Lesbians, gay men and bisexuals “flaunt” their sexual identity.**

One could argue that it is heterosexuals who continuously “flaunt” their sexuality and wedding rings, pictures in the office, and constant references to their opposite sex partners. Same sex lovers are often criticized for engaging in affectionate behaviour that goes unnoticed in heterosexual couples.

### **Early experiences of abuse, or problems with brain chemistry cause people to be lesbian or gay.**

We don't know what causes difference in sexual orientation. Some believe that their orientation was chosen or developed later in life, while others believe that they were “born that way.” We do know that social forces pressure all of us to be heterosexual, and it might be worth thinking about why we ask the question “what causes homosexuality,” but rarely, “what causes heterosexuality?”

### **HIV/AIDS is a gay disease.**

HIV/AIDS is caused by a virus. Viruses infect all kinds of people, regardless of their sexual orientation. HIV/AIDS is spread through the exchange of bodily fluids such as blood, semen and breast milk. Some people have contracted HIV/AIDS from sharing intravenous needles. While HIV/AIDS has been contracted by a large number of gay men, it has also been contracted by an increasingly large number of heterosexual men, women, children and infants.

### **Trans-identified people are unnatural. The sex assigned to us at birth is our “real” sex and gender.**

The sex assigned to us at birth is not necessarily our “real” sex or gender. Trans-identified people may experience a very painful discrepancy between their core sense of gender identity and their bodies. For some, surgery or hormone therapy can help resolve that discrepancy. Even our clear cut ideas about there being two distinct biological sexes are unfounded. About 4% of the population are born to some extent with ambiguous genitalia or the sex characteristics of both sexes. This is largely hidden from mainstream society because these children, called intersex, are often surgically altered to bring them in line with social expectations about sex and gender.

### **LGBTQ people are promiscuous.**

LGBTQ people are neither more nor less sexually active than heterosexual people. Some heterosexuals and gays and lesbians are involved in long term, monogamous relationships while others may have multiple partners. Some remain celibate.

### **Bisexuals are sex fiends who will do it with anyone.**

There is no evidence to suggest that bisexuals are more sexually active than anyone else. Bisexual women and men are emotionally and sexually attracted to more than one gender. They may be with women at one point in their lives and men at another time, or engage in sexual activity and relationships with a variety of partners, regardless of gender.

### **Homosexuality exists only in Western societies. Same-sex desire and relationships do not exist outside of North America and European countries.**

LGBTQ people exist in all cultures, even though they may go by different names. For example, in some Aboriginal cultures, gay and trans-identified people may identify themselves as “two-spirit,” and they are perceived to play a special role because they have qualities of both genders. However, there are many countries where homosexuality is criminal, punishable by death, or at the very least strictly forbidden. In such circumstances LGBTQ people will go to great lengths to hide their identity. It is worth noting that many LGBTQ people in Western cultures also feel the need to hide their identities because of social stigma and discrimination.

## Queer Definitions, Questions & Answers

Here are some commonly used and experienced questions and terms that relate to queer issues and culture.

*PLEASE NOTE: these are not "written in stone," nor are they infallible by any means. Language as a whole, especially language in the queer community, is constantly evolving. There are subtle differences in usage and terminology depending on time period, intended audience, context, and geographical locale.*

*PLEASE ALSO NOTE: transmen and transwomen are included in the definitions of men and women*

### **What is queer?**

This term is commonly used to define lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, two-spirit, and other people and institutions on the margins of mainstream culture; however, the definition continues to be debated among queer theorists and within sexual and gender minority communities.

### **What does it mean to be queer-positive?**

Queer-positive people are those who may not be queer themselves, but are supportive of queer-identified persons and the queer community.

### **Isn't the word queer considered offensive or homophobic?**

Historically the term has been used to denigrate sexual and gender minorities but more recently it has been reclaimed by many in these groups and is increasingly used as an expression of pride. Queer can be a convenient, inclusive term when referring to issues and experiences affecting the many groups subsumed under this umbrella. Because it is still used to demean lesbian, gay, bisexual, two-spirit and trans people, those who do not identify as queer or queer-positive are urged to use the term with caution, or not at all.

### **What does LGBTQ mean?**

Literally: lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer. This is the acronym that the Positive Space team has decided to use consistently in terms of our particular campaign with the understanding that it includes transsexual, transgender, two-spirit, questioning, and others who feel that they identify as diverse in their sexuality or gender.

### **What are some other important terms and definitions?**

There are a variety of terms used throughout the queer community that may be confusing for those who are unfamiliar with them.

- **Gay**  
Historically, a code word used to describe the "underworld" of artists, intellectuals, and street people living their sexuality on the fringes of society (eg, "in the gay life"). Although this term is used to mean same-sex oriented, regardless of gender, it tends to be used more often in our society to refer to same-sex oriented men.
- **Lesbian**  
Historically, a resident of the island of Lesbos, including the poet Sappho and a

community of women in the 7th century BCE. Today it is used to describe same-sex oriented women.

- **Bisexual**  
A person who is attracted to persons irrespective of their gender or gender identity.
- **Trans**  
Trans (trans-identified) is an inclusive term referring to the many people who cross socially constructed gender boundaries by adopting a gender identity, presentation, or behaviour that is not typically associated with one's assigned biological sex. This includes *transsexuals*, *transgenderists*, *cross-dressers* and *intersex* people.
  - **Transsexual**  
Transsexuals are extremely unhappy in the gender to which they are assigned and change their gender roles and bodies in order to live as members of the 'other' sex. Modern medical technology (synthesized sex hormones, electrolysis, plastic surgery) makes this much easier than it was in the past. About 50% of transsexuals are male-to-female and 50% are female-to-male (FTM). Many have sex reassignment surgery, in which their bodies are modified to conform to their gender identity.
  - **Transgenderist/Gender Queer**  
A person who lives as a member of the an other gender but without the extreme need or desire to modify their body shown by transsexuals. Some live as members of the other sex while others stake out "third gender" status. Transgenderists may take hormones, but do not have genital sex reassignment surgery.
  - **Drag queen/king**  
A male-to-female or female-to-male cross-dresser, often gay or lesbian (though not always), who uses dramatic clothes, make-up, and mannerisms to entertain, as desired, other men or women.
  - **Cross-dresser**  
The act of wearing clothing considered to be appropriate for the opposite sex, regardless of sexual orientation. Often preferred over "*transvestite*".
  - **Intersex**  
Intersex describes those who are born with mixed sex characteristics. They may have some sex/reproductive organs associated with both female and male sexes; or they may have other discrepancies among chromosomal or hormonal markers of sex. Typically physicians decide at birth which "sex" is more surgically or aesthetically viable. The assigned gender may, or may not, match the person's gender identity. Many intersex people are angry that these decisions were made without their awareness or consent, and for, essentially, cosmetic purposes. Intersex activists wish to prevent this from happening to other infants and children.
- **Gender identity**  
Gender identity refers to the self-image or belief held about one's gender as being female, male, androgynous, or something else (e.g., third, fourth gender). Gender identity may differ from assigned sex and, if so, the individual may identify as trans. Gender identity differs from sexual orientation. Trans people may be heterosexual, lesbian, gay or bisexual. However, trans people who are heterosexual are often

assumed to be same-sex oriented and, as a result, experience heterosexism as well as transphobia.

- **Sexual orientation**

Sexual orientation includes emotional attachment, sexual attraction, sexual behaviours and, often, identification with a particular culture (e.g., lesbian, gay, bisexual, two-spirited, trans, or heterosexual culture). Sexual orientation includes, but does not solely comprise sexual behaviour. It is also not tied to a particular position in the nature/nurture controversy.

- **Two-spirit**

Two-spirit is a term adopted by some contemporary North American Aboriginal peoples to refer those who embody masculine and feminine spirit. The term is inclusive and can refer to both sexual orientation and/or gender identity or expression. Therefore, lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and heterosexual trans-people may all refer to themselves as two-spirit. Terms such as “berdache” have a colonial origin; and “gay” and “lesbian” are, to many, Eurocentric and culturally irrelevant to Aboriginal two-spirit people. By some, two-spirit implies embodying a balance of nurturer and warrior.

- **Heterosexism**

Heterosexism refers to the system of beliefs and practices that exclude and demean those who are, or are perceived to be, same-sex oriented. Heterosexism includes the promotion by individuals and/or institutions of the superiority of heterosexuality over all other orientations. Heterosexist beliefs include the assumption that everyone should be heterosexual; that everyone is heterosexual, unless known to be otherwise; and that non-heterosexuals are unnatural. Heterosexism can be intentional or unintentional. Like other forms of discrimination, it is often invisible to those who are not its targets.

- **Coming out**

The act of disclosing one's sexual orientation or gender identity. Coming out can refer to the acknowledgement of one's own sexual or gender feelings; the confiding of same-sex orientation or gender identity to another person; or to a transition period of such a disclosure to many people. Often also called "*coming out of the closet*."

- **The Phobias**

The fear, hatred, or dislike of queer individuals are often referred to as *biphobia*, *homophobia*, and *transphobia*.

*Definitions adapted from the Queen's Human Rights Office*

<http://clubs.myams.org/equip/index.asp?page=resources&sub=faq>

For a detailed glossary please visit:

[www.uwo.ca/pridelib/family/glossary/index.html](http://www.uwo.ca/pridelib/family/glossary/index.html)

## **Trans Terminology**

(adapted from information compiled by Kyle Scanlon, 519 Community Centre, Toronto)

**Assigned Gender at Birth** – the gender one is considered to be at birth, due to the presence of whatever external sex organs. Once this determination is made, it becomes a label used for raising the child in either one gender image or the other.

**Bigender** – those who feel they have both a masculine and a feminine side to their personalities. Some bigender persons cross-dress, while others evolve into transsexuals and may have sex reassignment surgery.

**Clock(ed)** – when someone detects that you are transgender, as the following example: a male-to-female transsexual is in public, living in the preferred female image, when someone calls out, 'that's a man!' This is embarrassing at the least, and devastating at the worst. The word 'clocked' apparently comes from the phrase, 'read me like a clock'.

**Cross-dresser (CD)** – someone who, from time-to-time, wears the clothes of the opposite gender.

**FTM** – female-to-male (transvestite or transsexual). Also, 'transmen'- Trans men should be respectfully referred to as men regardless of what stage they are at in their transition.

**Gender expression** – all external characteristics and behaviours that are socially defined as either masculine or feminine, such as dress, mannerisms, physical characteristics and speech patterns.

**Gender Identity** – a person's innate, deeply felt psychological identification as male or female, which may or may not correspond to the person's body or sex assigned at birth. There is no clear agreement on how gender identity is formed, but most current theories say that gender identity is formed before birth.

**Intersex** – one who is born with sex chromosomes, external genitalia or an internal reproductive system that is not considered 'standard' for either male or female. At least 4% of the population is born to some extent with ambiguous genitalia or the sex characteristics of both sexes.

**MTF** – male-to-female trans person. Also, 'transwoman' – transwomen should be respectfully referred to as women regardless of what stage they are at in their transition.

**Passing** – the ability of a trans person to not be perceived as trans, for reasons of personal choice or safety. Given the high cost of trans surgeries and lack of accessible hormones, passing is often an economic issue and not a reflection of how 'real' a trans person is.

**Sex** – the physical aspects of our body: chromosomes, genitals, hormones, etc. Within North America, the dominant perception (reinforced by medical/legal systems) is that one's sex determines one's gender.

**Trans** – often used in North America as an umbrella term for transsexuals, transgenders and others. Not all 'gender variant' people will identify with this label.

**Transgender (TG)** – umbrella term describing all people who either cross the gender binary or who do not easily fit into one box or another.

**Transition** – the process of changing sex, including hormones, cross-living, and finally surgery. A practical minimum for this process is about two years, but usually it takes longer, sometimes much longer.

**Transsexual (TS)** – a person whose lived gender is different than the one ascribed at birth: may undergo changes with hormones or surgery.

### **Diverse terms related to gender**

(From *The Toronto Trans and Two-Spirit Primer*)

**Aionolit:** (Hebrew) "which is the female counterpart to a eunuch, or gay man. The Talmud translations in English call aionolit a barren woman, but the context shows that it's talking about FTM trans and lesbians."-- Faris

**Baa:** (Navajo American) a woman warrior; a Navajo woman's name; a woman with masculine characteristics, a tomboy.

**Babamba:** (Congo) an African people known to have had female husbands or male daughters

**Bade:** (Crow American 'not man, not woman') a trans person

**Binabae:** (Filipino) a person born male who is "like a woman" in some way

**Bonae:** (Roman) 'the good people' male and female cross dressed pagan dancers who had the power to grant prosperity to any house that gave them gifts

**Buyazil:** (Gisu African) a male or female cross dresser.

**Elxa:** (Native American) a trans person

**Faka Fafini:** (Polynesian) An effeminate man who dressed and lived as a woman, and who was also accepted by Polynesian society.

**Ghoti/Ghodi:** (Old Norse) a trans priest or priestess, usually MTF

**Hijra:** (India) male born person who lives in-between genders and occupies a traditional sacred role.

**Isangoma:**(Zulu African) male-to-female priestess or female-to-priests

**Jota:** (Mexico) a feminine gay man who dresses as a woman and is the receptive partner for anal sex, sometimes with partners who do not realize she is male; a drag queen, a cross dresser

**Katoeys:** (Thai) a cross dresser, a member of a third sex

**Kitesha:** (Basongye African) alternate gender role for males and females.

**Lhamana:** (Zuni American) male to female trans person.

**Mke-Si-Mume:** (Swahili) a man-woman, a gender variant person; a gay man or lesbian woman

**Moroni Noho:** (Paiute American) female to male trans person.

**Mutarajjulāt:** (9th century Islam) 'women who wish to resemble men.

**Nadle, Nadleeh:** (Navajo American) 'other', usually MTF, but also FTM.

**Niizh Manitoag:** (Algonquin American) 'Two Spirit', the Great Mystery in Its role as the hermaphrodite Creator of the world, and the origin of the term two-spirit

**Posestra:** (15th century to present day Albania) an Albanian woman who swore perpetual virginity, wore men's clothes, and was accorded the legal and social privileges of a man. Some even served as soldiers in the Turkish army

**Sal-Zikrum:** (Babylonian) 'male woman'; "Based on evidence from the Code of Hammurabi, the Sumerian culture recognized a separate type of woman called a salzikrum...Salzikrum is a compound word literally meaning "male woman." A salzikrum was entitled to greater rights of inheritance than an ordinary woman."--Faris

**Tainna Wa'ippe:** (Shoshoni American) man-woman, a trans person with a male body

**Transformista:** (Spanish) a transvestite

**Travesti:** (Brazil) born biologically as men, travesties go to lengths to appear as women in dress and body, while sometimes still identifying as being male homosexuals.

**Two-Spirited/Twin-Spirited:** (Niizh Manitoag, Algonquin American 'Two Spirit', 1990 ) the Great Mystery in Its manifestation as the hermaphrodite Creator of the world; a person with both masculine and feminine attributes; a gay, lesbian, bisexual, or trans Native American; this term is contested; all parties agree that the appropriate tribal designation should be used when possible because tribal roles vary immensely.

**Vestido:** (Mexico) a female who dresses as a man and who successfully passes as a man; a masculine lesbian who wears male clothing.

**Winkte:** (Lakota Sioux American 'kill woman') a sacred person who lives either full or part time as the opposite gender; if living part time has apparel, name, and family for each gender, usually MTF, "would be woman"—Little Crow, et al

**Wobo:** (Maale African,) lit. 'crooked', meaning gender variant.

## **Myths and Realities of Trans-identified Persons**

(Adapted from UBCs Positive Space Information)

### **Trans-identified people are all the same.**

Trans-identified is an umbrella term used to describe anyone who is gender different; someone with an innate identification as the opposite gender; or even someone born of one gender, but having either a casual affinity for clothing and/or affectations of the opposite gender (cross dressers).

Trans-identified persons can range from transsexuals (both male-to-female and also female-to-male) to cross dressers to female/male impersonators (drag queens/kings) to gender queer people who don't feel they fit or choose not to fit one of the two categories in the gender binary (man or woman) and the social expectations that these two roles imply.

### **All trans-identified people are transsexual.**

Some trans-identified persons are transsexual and may undergo sex reassignment surgery, take hormones or other behavioural and physiological changes to change their sex. However, many trans-identified persons do not want to undergo sex reassignment or cannot due to lack of access to resources.

Some cross dressers identify as transgender and they are content to dress in clothing usually considered to be appropriate for the "opposite" gender and have no desire to change their biological sex.

### **All trans-identified people are really just homosexual.**

Gender is separate from sexual orientation. Some trans persons identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual and others identify as heterosexual. If someone who is trans is attracted to persons of the same sex and then undergo sex reassignment surgery, then they could be considered heterosexual if their attraction stays the same. Some people's attractions change after going through a transition. Though there is no real connection with gender and sexual desire, attraction and orientation.

### **All transsexuals change their sexuality on hormones.**

Some transsexual persons take hormones and some do not. Sexual orientation can be fluid in trans-identified persons as well as persons whose gender matches their sex. Attractions/orientations may change for some people during or after a transition, others remain attracted to the same gender to which they were attracted before the transition.

### **Trans persons are prone to sexual perversion or pedophilia.**

This is an unsubstantiated and misinformed belief, used to discredit trans persons, and similar myths exist about lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and intersex persons. Society often views

someone who is different or exotic as a potential threat and thus, suspect. It is always based on lack of, or very limited exposure to individuals who identify as part of this community.

### **All trans-identified people are like the ones on Jerry Springer.**

The only real transpersons on such talk shows are the most sensational, over-the-top folks they can find. It draws the ratings. Such shows have also gone so far as to hire actors to play 'trans' characters. The average transperson, just like the average gender-conforming person, is too mundane to appear on such a show.

### **It isn't worth the trouble to hire or retain trans-identified employees.**

Diversity in the workplace is always important, in fact invaluable. The more different points-of-view that you have in your company or organization, the better prepared you will be to meet the needs and demands of the diverse population who use your products, or services. Having more diversity in your workplace will cause you to become more aware of the negative effects of different types of oppression. Once you are aware you can start to take measure to prevent different forms of discrimination and harassment. That's good for business and for our society.

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Trans people have existed in every culture from the beginning of time. The term "trans" crosses all racial, ethnic, social and class boundaries. In its general sense, it refers to anyone whose behaviour or identity falls outside of stereotypical expectations for their gender or sex

Most all of us have some level of characteristics that are stereotypical of the other gender. The trans individual experiences it to a much greater degree. Their personal characteristics, appearance and behaviours differ significantly from typical expectations about how women and men are "supposed" to be. For people in the process of trying to understand what is happening to them, getting information about trans people can be very important. There are books and movies that they can access, as well as other trans people with whom they can talk.

Some of the issues that trans persons face include:

(adapted from Alexander John Goodrum, [Gender Identity 101: A Transgender Primer.](#))

- Job, service and housing discrimination. Even when legal protections for gay men, bisexuals and lesbians exist, they generally do not cover trans people because very few communities explicitly state "gender identity" or "gender expression" in their protection ordinances. The *Ontario Human Rights Code* does not explicitly include gender identity as a ground of prohibited discrimination but it is assumed that issues around gender identity are considered under the ground of "sex". Gender Identity has been "written in" as a prohibited ground in the *George Brown College Prevention of Discrimination and Harassment Policy*.
- Transphobic violence and hatred is not rare. Violence against trans persons can be particularly brutal. On average one trans person is murdered in the US every month. For example, in 1997, in Washington D.C. a pre-operative transsexual woman named Tyra

Hunter was fatally injured in an auto accident. Paramedics at first refused to treat her after they discovered she had male genitalia, laughing and mocking as she lay dying. In December, 1993, a female-to-male (FTM) named Brandon Teena was raped by two men who discovered that he was born female. Brandon reported the rape to the local sheriff who refused to investigate, dismissing him with the derisive comment "What are you, anyway?" Later, the same two men whom the sheriff refused to arrest for the rape murdered Brandon and two of his friends. Brandon's story was later made into the movie *Boys Don't Cry*.

- Prejudice against trans individuals is pervasive. There is a long-held view by medical providers and researchers, as well as the public at large, that being trans is pathological. This, in itself, constitutes one of the most significant barriers to care. As a result of this labeling, transindividuals have underutilized health and social services. A survey of trans men and women in San Francisco reported that many in the population are chronically underserved with regard to basic medical and psychological support services. Few resources exist that address their specific needs or provide necessary consumer education and regular medical follow-up (Asian AIDS Project, 1995; San Francisco Human Rights Commission, 1994).
- Social and economic marginalization frequently accompanies the trans experience. Rejected by family and community, with reduced educational and employment opportunities because of the harassment faced in both settings, trans women and men are commonly subjected to discrimination, homelessness, unemployment and poverty. Many are unable to afford basic medical and mental health services. Furthermore, a disproportionate number of these individuals are people of colour, HIV-positive, and/or youth, thereby increasing the likelihood they are socially and medically underserved (Israel & Tarver, 1997).
- As with the general population, trans persons of colour are more likely to be economically disadvantaged and face disproportionately higher rates of victimization, unemployment, substance abuse, HIV infection, prostitution and other difficulties. Trans persons of colour also report a loss of community identity when their gender identity becomes known. In African American, Asian, Pacific Islander or Latin American contexts, for example, heterosexual males and females commonly stereotype gay males and lesbians as no longer part of their ethnic community because they assume that all people of colour are or should be heterosexual. This ostracism carries over to trans individuals (Israel & Tarver, 1997)
- Fear and unnecessary worry over daily activities that gender conforming persons take for granted. For example, "which bathroom do I use when I am out in public," "how will others react when they see me in there," "will I be harassed or beaten for using the "wrong" (according to them) bathroom," "can I "hold it" all day until I can get home and use my bathroom in privacy and peace," "what option do I check on these forms with forced-choice gender options (M or F)," "will the person receiving the form believe me or question me," "what if I don't identify as M or F, what do I check," will I get kicked out of my all female club if I come out as a transman," "will I be subject to violence if I come out," "will my friends, family, spouse, children, employers, coworkers, students, etc., accept me?"

## **Myths and Facts Related to Feminists and Lesbians**

(taken from GALE-Gay and Lesbian Educators of BC)

### **Lesbians always understand each other**

This myth implies that lesbianism is easy and that all lesbians support each other. This myth may seem positive, but is extremely misleading and can cause much pain. Just as people in any community have different beliefs, values and desires, so this is true in the lesbian community. We do not always understand each other. Important issues need much discussion and debate to build alliances.

Because women have been taught in our society to devalue themselves, much internal homophobia and sexism needs to be overcome to develop a sense of personal power and control over one's life. When two lesbians form a relationship, the relationship can suffer from poor self esteem, unclear or unrealistic expectations (that this will be the perfect relationship), and a fear of discrimination from the outside community. We do not always know what our partner wants or needs; we can only learn that through clear communication and acceptance of each other's differences.

### **All lesbians are feminists. All feminists are lesbians.**

Being a feminist does not necessarily mean that one is a lesbian and vice versa. Being a feminist requires more than being woman-identified; it involves having a political analysis of how and why women have been oppressed and understanding the dynamics of power and control. It involves a willingness to fight oppression in one's personal life and within our society at large. It does mean that heterosexual feminists have a responsibility to identify lesbian oppression, as part of the oppression of all women, and to understand the effect of heterosexism in all areas of one's life.

### **There is no need for labels (e.g. lesbian) because we are all human beings.**

This myth is based on the belief that we are all human beings (and women) and that labels are divisive. Some lesbians see their orientation as personal, not political, and some heterosexual women prefer to view all women as coming from a common culture. However, some women have more rights than others. The label "lesbian" reflects a lack of opportunity and privilege in our society. When lesbians can be protected from losing their jobs or custody of their children and are free from harassment on all levels, we can then discard labels.

As well, the labels "lesbian" and "dyke" have been reclaimed within the lesbian community and are seen by many lesbians as a proud and positive part of our identity.

### **All lesbians are man-haters. All man-hating women are lesbians.**

Lesbians are women who form intimate relationships with women. Although not sexually attracted to men, many lesbians have male children and maintain close male friendships. Being a lesbian is how women feel about women, not how they feel about men. Some lesbians are angry about heterosexual privilege, male control and power, but are not angry with individual men. It is more

often true that heterosexual women have issues with men and anti-male attitudes that are communicated to their children and to others.

## **Myths and Realities of Intersex Persons**

(adapted from UBCs Positive Space information)

### **Intersexuality does not exist or is extremely rare.**

Intersexuality does exist and is more common than people think. The prevalence of intersexuality varies depending on how it is defined. It is a set of medical conditions that feature congenital anomalies of the reproductive and sexual system. That is, Intersex persons are born with sex chromosomes, external genitalia, or internal reproductive systems that are not considered 'standard' for either males or females.

### **Persons born Intersex are allowed to choose what medical intervention, if any, they would like.**

Very often the attending childbirth physician will push the parents to make an on-the-spot decision to allow them to alter the child's genitalia to more closely conform to either male or female (based on the doctor's opinion). The parents will often along with this arbitrary decision on the physician's part. Sometimes this decision is made by the physician without parental consent or knowledge. The reasoning is based on societal attitudes that isolate or exhibit passive or active bias toward anyone who is different.

### **Surgical intervention helps an Intersex child to be 'normal'.**

Sometimes it does help a child to live as a male or female, but most often it does not. The children quite often will not identify with the gender the birth physician has chosen for them, and pursue a surgical reassignment to correct this. Virtually always, the Intersex person is resentful that this decision was made without any consideration for their feelings or input. Also, the procedures performed often result in genital mutilation, causing physical and/or psychological discomfort and/or sexual dysfunction later in life.

### **Intersex persons are prone to sexual perversion or pedophilia.**

This is an unsubstantiated and misinformed belief, used to discredit intersex persons, and similar myths exist about lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and trans persons. Society often views someone who is different or exotic as a potential threat and thus, suspect. It is always based on lack of, or very limited exposure to individuals who identify as part of this community.

### **It isn't worth the trouble to hire or retain an intersex employee.**

Diversity in the workplace is always important, in fact invaluable. The more different points-of-view that you have in your company or organization, the better prepared you will be to meet the needs and demands of the diverse population who use your products, or services. Having more diversity in your workplace will cause you to become more aware of the negative effects of different types of oppression. Once you are aware you can start to take measure to prevent different forms of discrimination and harassment. That's good for business and for our society.

## **Myths and Realities of Bisexuality**

(adapted from Western Michigan University, *Safe on Campus Resource Manual*)

Sexuality runs along a continuum. It is not a static “thing” but rather has the potential to change throughout one’s lifetime, and varies infinitely among people. We cannot fit our sexuality into nice neat categories, which determine who and what we are. Bisexuality exists at many points along the continuum.

**Bisexuality doesn’t really exist. People who consider themselves bisexual are going through a phase/confused/undecided/fence sitting. Ultimately they’ll settle down and realize they’re actually homosexual or heterosexual.**

Some people go through a transitional period of bisexuality on their way to adopting a lesbian/gay or heterosexual identity. For many others, a bisexual orientation remains a long-term orientation. For some bisexual people, same sex attractions were a transitional phase in their coming out as bisexual. Many bisexual people may well be confused, living in a society where their sexuality is denied by gays and straights alike, but that confusion is a function of oppression. Fence sitting is a misnomer; there is no “fence” between same-sex or different-sex orientations except in the minds of people who rigidly divide the two.

**Bisexuality doesn’t really exist. People who consider themselves bisexual are really heterosexual, but are experimenting/playing around/trying to be cool/liberated/trendy/politically correct.**

Whether an individual is an “experimenting heterosexual” or a bisexual person depends on how they define themselves, rather than some external standard. While there certainly are people who engage in bisexual behaviour because they think it is trendy, this does not negate the people who come to a bisexual identity amidst pain and confusion and claim it with pride.

**Bisexuality doesn’t really exist. People who consider themselves bisexual are actually lesbian/gay, but haven’t fully accepted themselves and finished coming out of the closet.**

Bisexual orientation is a legitimate sexual orientation. Many bisexual people are completely out of the closet, but not on the lesbian/gay community’s terms (it is worth noting that many lesbians and gay men are not completely out of the closet and their process is generally respected; it is also worth noting that the lesbian/gay community whose “terms” are in question here has tended to be quite different for working class lesbians, gays of colour, etc.) Bisexual people in this country share with lesbians and gay men the debilitating experience of heterosexism and homophobia, but also experience biphobia which can be just as pervasive within lesbian or gay communities as in straight spaces.

**Bisexual people are shallow/narcissistic/untrustworthy/hedonistic/and immoral.**

This myth reflects our culture’s ambivalence over sex and pleasure. The “sex” in bisexuality gets overemphasized, and our culture projects onto bisexual people its fascination with and condemnation of sex and pleasure.

**Bisexual people are equally attracted to both sexes. Bisexual means having concurrent lovers of both sexes.**

Most bisexual people are primarily attracted to one gender more than others, but do not deny the lesser attraction, regardless of whether they act on it. Some bisexual people are never sexual. Bisexual people *can* have lovers of any sex, not *must* have lovers of all sexes. Some bisexual people may have concurrent lovers, but they do not need to be with different sexes in order to feel fulfilled.

**Bisexual people are promiscuous, hypersexual swingers who are attracted to every person they meet. Bisexual people cannot be monogamous, nor can they live in committed relationships. They could never be celibate.**

Bisexual people have a range of sexual behaviours. Like lesbians, gay men or heterosexual people, some have multiple partners, some have one partner, and some go through periods without any partners. Promiscuity is no more prevalent in the bisexual population than in other groups of people.

**Bisexual people spread AIDS to the heterosexual and lesbian communities.**

This myth allows discrimination against bisexual people to be legitimized. The label “bisexual” simply refers to sexual orientation. It says nothing about whether one practices safer sex or not. AIDS occurs in people of all sexual orientations. AIDS is contracted through unsafe sexual practices, shared needles, and contaminated blood transfusions. Sexual orientation does not “cause” or “spread” AIDS.

**Politically, bisexual people are traitors to the cause of lesbian/gay liberation. They pass as heterosexual to avoid trouble and maintain heterosexual privilege.**

Obviously there are bisexual people who pass as heterosexual to avoid trouble. There are also many lesbians and gay men who do this too. To “pass” for heterosexual and deny the part of you that loves people of the same gender is just as painful and damaging for a bisexual person as it is for a lesbian or gay man. Politicized bisexual people remain aware of heterosexual privileges and are committed enough to LGBTQ rights not to abandon LGBTQ communities when in heterosexual relationships.

**Bisexual women will always leave their lesbian lovers for men.**

Although this does happen sometimes, one can also find examples of bisexual women who have good long-term relationships with lesbians. There are bisexual people for whom same-sex attraction is a phase; there are also lesbians for whom same-sex behaviour is a phase. There are bisexual and lesbian women who never really come to grips with their sexuality and internalized homophobia. Bisexual women who truly accept themselves and their sexuality will leave a relationship when it no longer works for them. The same could be said of lesbians who accept themselves. As hard as it is to get clear about the reasons a relationship may end, and as many challenges as lesbian relationships may face, the notion that bisexual women can't handle lesbian relationships is just a stereotype.

**Bisexual people get the best of both worlds and a doubled chance for a date on Saturday night.**

Combine our society's extreme heterosexism and homophobia with lesbian and gay exclusion of bisexual people into their communities, and it might be more accurate to say that bisexual people get the worst of both worlds. As to the doubled chance for a date theory, that depends more upon the individual's personality than it does upon their sexuality. If a bisexual individual has a hard time meeting people, their sexual orientation won't help much.

**Bisexual people are desperately unhappy, endlessly seeking some kind of peace they cannot ever find.**

Like lesbians and gay men who have been told that they will live awful lives, bisexual people can also respond that much of the pain comes from oppression. People concerned about the "awful lives" of bisexual people should join the fight against biphobia and homophobia. It is important to remember that "bisexual", "lesbian", "gay", "trans", "queer" and "heterosexual" are labels created by a homophobic, biphobic, transphobic, heterosexist society to separate and alienate us from each other. We are all unique and don't fit into distinct categories. We sometimes need to use these labels for political reasons or to increase our visibility. Seeing the beauty in our diversity while acknowledging and accepting the differences facilitates our sexual esteem.

## **If you haven't got it bi now...**

By Kathryn Payne

Board of Directors, Association of Lesbians and Gays of Ottawa

This is the second year in a row I have been asked to write a piece about bisexuality for The Charlatan. Last year I tried to explain what bisexuality is, why it is hard for me to live in a straight world and the things I hope for.

Since then I have grown tired of explaining my choices, tired of looking for understanding. This time I want to talk about what makes me angry and what you can do about it. I want you to think about what makes me angry and about what I have written as I did about what to write.

If you, dear reader, call yourself straight, I want you to think hard about a few things. Like the times, however secret, when you have wondered what it would be like to be with someone of your own gender. The curiosity as to whether a same sex lover would touch you differently, if you would have more in common with a same sex partner. Now consider, what are the chances the world would collapse if you talked about those ideas? And how, exactly, does it hurt you when others do allow themselves these thoughts and feelings?

If you think you are pretty open minded, if you think people are people, I would like you to count your queer friends. If the grand total is zero, chances are there is someone you know who is afraid to come out to you. If you do know someone who is bisexual, lesbian or gay, I want you to think for a second about how gutsy they are. Could you wear a T-shirt that says "I'm bisexual/lesbian/gay" to school for a day? Around your own house? Next time you see that person or one of those friends, congratulate them. They are brave, they are mini-heroines and heroes.

Now imagine tomorrow morning you wake up and you have been labeled. Because you like pecans the course of your entire life is altered. You can only eat them in private or people spit on you, call you names and drop you off bridges. If you tell people you like pecans (and if you don't you will always be afraid they will guess), they will either be disgusted or merely forget everything else about you. The only people who treat you like a real person, not just a pecan eater, are other Pecan Eaters. You will never, not for a moment, be able to forget what the

world has decided you are and that it hates you for your tastes.

If you are lesbian or gay, I want you to imagine the world took on an ugly twist. You have to come out all over again, to all the people who supported you the first time. Some of them will not accept you, others won't understand. The community you had established as safe – as a place you belonged – will regard you as something of a freak.

As if it were not enough that insensitive heterosexuals imagined you were in a phase, confused, unprincipled, an upstart, unnatural, spreading AIDS and being revoltingly promiscuous, now many of your friends and acquaintances join them in assuming the very same things.

You can no longer feel the comfortable in the places you are used to hanging out and you certainly can't take your lover there. You often wonder if you are seen as a traitor and even find yourself wondering if maybe you are. There are a handful of people who you can be certain accept you for who you are. They know you are the same person – never mind the gender of your partners. In this sort of world, queer readers, imagine how much you would want to be proud, how much you would be forced to prove.

If you are bisexual, I want you to crack a grin. Your capacity to lust and love, your self awareness and your courage are the stuff of genius. You are one of a growing number. In every major city in North America and Great Britain there is at least one bisexual group, made up of wildly diverse, interesting and welcoming people (I know because I have found some of them).

Historically, many amazing artists, authors and other such famous and infamous characters have lived bisexual lives. As self-identified bisexuals, we have been actively fighting in the queer struggle, along side lesbians and gay men, since before the Stonewall riots.

You are part of a dynamic community. We have been organizing ourselves since the early '70s. We are exploring and challenging the way sexuality is thought about. We are speaking out,

finding each other and smashing the myths that kept us quiet.

We are holding meetings, writing books, forcing gay and lesbian organizations to recognize and include us. We are marching on Pride Day, being honest about our feelings for women and men, living in an endless variety of relationship permutations and surviving in hostile environments. We **are** brave, we **are** upstarts and we **are** proud.

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## **2-Spirited People of the 1<sup>st</sup> Nations**

(Text from the website: [www.2spirits.com](http://www.2spirits.com))

### We Are Part of a Tradition

In many of our cultures before the arrival of Europeans to North America, "Two-Spirited" referred to an ancient teaching. Our Elders tell us of people who were gifted among all beings because they carried two spirits: that of male and female. It is told that women engaged in tribal warfare and married other women as there were men who married other men. These individuals were looked upon as a third gender in many cases and in almost all cultures they were honoured and revered. Two-Spirited people were often the visionaries, the healers and the medicine people. They were respected as fundamental components of our ancient culture and societies. This is our guiding force as well as our source of strength. This is the ancient heart of Two-Spirited People.

Today, Two-Spirited People are Native people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, other gender, third/fourth gender individuals that walk carefully between the worlds and between the genders. Unfortunately, due to many of the colonizing forces and experiences that Native people have gone through, the roles of Two-Spirit people have been lost in our consciousness and many Native People have adopted the homophobic attitudes that are present in today's society. With the coming of the Seventh Generation Two-Spirits are slowly relearning their traditional roles in Native Communities.

Ongoing education for all the Native communities, along with the Two-Spirit youth, is very important to our future. We believe that only when Two-Spirit People are brought back to their respected places as teachers, artists and healers will all Native People of Turtle Island, and by extension, the world, begin massive healing of spirit. We begin by greeting one another.

~Doe

## How Homophobic Myths Affect LGBTQ and All Youth

LGBTQ	All
Low self-esteem contributes to feelings of loneliness, worthlessness, fear and suicidal thoughts	Lack of accurate, reliable, truthful information perpetuates stereotypes and myths
Internalized homophobia, hate themselves as they perceive the world hates them; limits on full learning potential	Denial of personal experience that they may know and love people who are LGBTQ
Often forced to leave home and end up “at risk” and street-involved (40% of street youth in Vancouver self-identify as LGBTQ)	Lack of support for same-gender friendships and family relationships (such as parents and siblings)
Targets of intolerance, harassment, threats and violence	Strict gender roles enforced; pressure on youth about how to look, dress and behave, no allowance for individuality
Drop out of high school – 28% of LGBTQ students do not graduate, may live in poverty	Kids perceived to be LGBTQ are harassed, targeted and beaten, often within school settings
Contributes to a variety of coping mechanisms including substance abuse, homelessness, unsafe sex, cutting	97% of all students have experienced homophobic name-calling by grade 8
Adds to vulnerability to particular forms of abuse, including sexual abuse	Fear and hatred is taught by silence on the issue
Lack of protection from adults in authority leads to a sense of unworthiness, of not being entitled to human rights and respect	Friendships with queer youth and adults are disrupted and damaged

## The Kinsey Scale

When thinking about gender identity and sexual orientation, it is important to view these as continuums, rather than dichotomies of male/female or heterosexual/homosexual. As Dr. Alfred Kinsey demonstrated in his famous studies on sexual behaviour in the 1940s and 1950s, a range of options between these polar points exist. (Similar scales do not yet exist for gender expression, however, it is clear from much recent trans theory and from listening to voices from these communities, that gender identity also exists along a continuum. Some people [trans or not] identify as exclusively male, others identify as exclusively female and others as somewhere in-between or entirely different.)

Kinsey adopted a 0-6 scale to describe individuals on actual sexual experiences and psychological reactions. Although an indication of sexual practices, rather than sexual orientation, the idea that sexuality exists along a continuum remains popular today. Kinsey's scale is as follows:

Sexual Behaviour:

- 0 Entirely Heterosexual
- 1 Predominantly heterosexual, only incidentally homosexual
- 2 Predominantly heterosexual, but with a distinct homosexual history
- 3 Equally heterosexual and homosexual
- 4 Predominantly homosexual, but with a distinct heterosexual history
- 5 Predominantly homosexual, only incidentally heterosexual
- 6 Entirely homosexual

It is from Kinsey's work that the 10% figure (10% of the population is lesbian or gay, and a higher percentage is bisexual) arose. Although many people will say "I am Kinsey (whatever)," it should be noted that subsequent researchers such as Klein have found it more useful to rate people on a variety of levels, such as "Past History," "Present History," "Present Feelings," and "Future Inclinations."

# How to Handle Harassment in the Hallways in 3 Minutes or Less!

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## 1. Stop the Harassment

- Interrupt the comment or halt the physical harassment.
- Do not pull student aside for confidentiality unless absolutely necessary.
- Make sure all the students in the area hear your comments.

## 2. Identify the Harassment

- Label the form of harassment: "You just made a harassing comment based upon race" (ethnicity, religion, sex, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, size, age, etc.).
- Do not imply the victim is a member of that identifiable group.

## 3. Broaden the Response

- Do not personalize your response at this stage: "We, at this school, do not harass people." "Our community does not appreciate hateful/thoughtless behavior."
- Re-identify the offensive behavior: "This name calling can also be hurtful to others who overhear it."

## 4. Ask for Change in Future Behavior

- Personalize the response: "Chris, please pause and think before you act."
- Check in with the victim at this time: "Please tell me if this continues. We can take future action to work out this problem. We want everyone to be safe at this school."

Retrieved from [www.project10.org](http://www.project10.org)

## Changing Personal Patterns of Prejudices

Reducing prejudices needs to be more than an organizational goal; it needs to be a personal goal for each of us. The following list contains things we can do as individuals to help reduce prejudices within ourselves and in those around us.

1. Acknowledge that you have learned prejudicial information about other people. Without this acknowledge nothing can change.
2. Confront without guilt or blame the stereotypes that you have learned.
3. Enter a supportive group or a supportive relationship for making the needed changes.
4. Make a commitment to change and make a commitment to a process of change.
5. Become aware of your own "self-talk" about other groups of people.
6. Challenge the irrationality of the prejudicial thoughts or "self-talk" statements.
7. Increase your exposure to or contact with those who belong to the group(s) toward which you have learned some prejudicial stereotypes.
8. Thought-stopping is a valuable process for changing one's "self-talk" about others.
9. Make use of Premack's Principle\*, a small rule that has power for change.
10. Learn how other groups see your own identity group.
11. Feeling good about ourselves is important in being about to accept people who are different from us.
12. Accepting indecision is an important learning style.
13. Developing empathy skills is an effective way of increasing our acceptance of others.
14. Develop listening skills so that we can really hear other people.
15. Develop an appreciation for the complexities of the universe. Knowing that one truth does not preclude another is an important concept.
16. Developing our own ability to experience caring about other people is not only important for them, but allows us to be in touch with our own connectedness and adds meaning to our lives.
17. Learning about other groups is an important way to develop understanding.
18. Valuing diversity in human appearance and in nature is important. Diversity is the reality of the nature and the strength of a species.
19. Seeking self-understanding increases the ability to accept oneself and others.
20. Responding to prejudicial jokes is critical as we are to stand for something and identity ourselves. Initially, we need to respond to prejudicial jokes in a way that clearly communicates two things:
  - That we do not believe the person intended to harm others.
  - That we personally find meaning in the joke that is harmful.
21. Responding to negative terms about groups of people helps us to know what we stand for and helps others to know as well.
22. Research your investments so that you are only investing in firms with strong policies of affirmative action and respect for human rights.

\* More probable behaviours will reinforce less probable behaviours.

# How to Fight Homophobia, Biphobia, Transphobia and Heterosexism: A Guide for Allies

## Challenge Discrimination

- Tell your friends and coworkers that homophobic, biphobic, and transphobic jokes are not OK.
- Name transphobic, biphobic, homophobic and heterosexist behaviour when you see it and give constructive suggestions for change.
- Be aware that violent language left unchallenged can, and does, lead to violent behaviour

## Model Anti-Oppressive Behaviour

- Stop assuming that everyone is straight.
- Value your same-sex friendships.
- Stop assuming that everyone fits easily into male or female boxes.
- Don't tease others for non-traditional gender behaviour.

## Develop Inclusive Language

- Don't use derogatory terms to talk about queer or trans people.
- Get your pronouns right. Make sure the pronouns you use to refer to transsexual and trans people are the pronouns they prefer. It is extremely rude and hurtful to use the word "it".
- Don't use "gay" to mean un-cool or pathetic; or fag, dyke, sissy, freak or whore as insults.
- Use words like "partner" and "significant other" to refer to someone you are involved with.

## Educate Yourself and Others

- Learn about LGBTQ issues.
- Talk about transphobia, biphobic, and homophobia with family friends and colleagues.
- Discuss LGBTQ issues.
- Include positive images of, or references to, LGBTQ people when ever you have the power to do so: in posters, libraries, film festivals, curriculum, pub nights, prom nights... even when (especially when!) the event /content is not specifically queer or trans

## Support

- Respect the confidentiality of people who "come out" to you.
- Listen empathetically to the experiences of LGBTQ people.
- Learn about resources for the LGBTQ community so you can refer people who need support.