

A Model of Heterosexual Ally Development

Status 1: Pre-Contact (Non-identification)

Heterosexual individuals in this status will have some awareness of gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals because of popular culture and the media, but they will not have close contact with an openly GLB person(s). They will believe that heterosexuals and heterosexual relationships are superior to GLB people and their relationships. They will have very negative attitudes toward GLB people and not identify as an ally.

Status 2: Contact* and Retreat

Heterosexual individuals in this status have contact with a family member, friend, or coworker who has come out to them. This personal contact leads to a discovery that GLB people are "normal" human beings. Some heterosexuals may experience a hyper-vigilance or be focused on associations with GLB people, which leads to a close relationship with members of the GLB community. Personal contact enables a transition to Status 3, which is characterized by an increase in awareness and knowledge and a reduction in negative attitudes.

Retreat: A heterosexual person can become essentially closed to GLB people and issues and retreat to Status I for a variety of reasons, including adherence to non-inclusive religious and cultural beliefs and conformity to traditional gender roles.

*Some heterosexual people may begin to identify as an ally (Statuses 3 and 4) without this personal contact as a result of becoming more liberal, developing less restrictive religious beliefs, or wanting to help others. They will eventually experience Status 2, enabling them to develop fully as allies.

Status 3: Internal Identification

Heterosexual individuals in Status 3 and 4 begin to develop a positive identity as an ally to GLB people. Individuals in Status 3 do not publicly identify as an ally, but do have greater contact with members of the GLB community and with heterosexual people who identify as allies (individuals in Status 4). They will begin to realize the importance of being supportive of GLB people and begin to show this support in a limited way. They will possess less negative attitudes toward GLB people and a higher level of awareness and knowledge.

Status 4: External Identification

Heterosexual individuals in this status will take pride in being an ally to GLB people, because they realize how much fuller their lives are as a result of knowing openly GLB people. Among the characteristics of individuals at Status 4 are respect and appreciation for people of different sexual orientations, low negative attitudes and a high level of awareness and knowledge, and demonstrated support for LGBT people. They will know other allies among their friends, family, and colleagues, but may feel alienated from non-allies.

Adapted from Kerry Poynter, 1997

