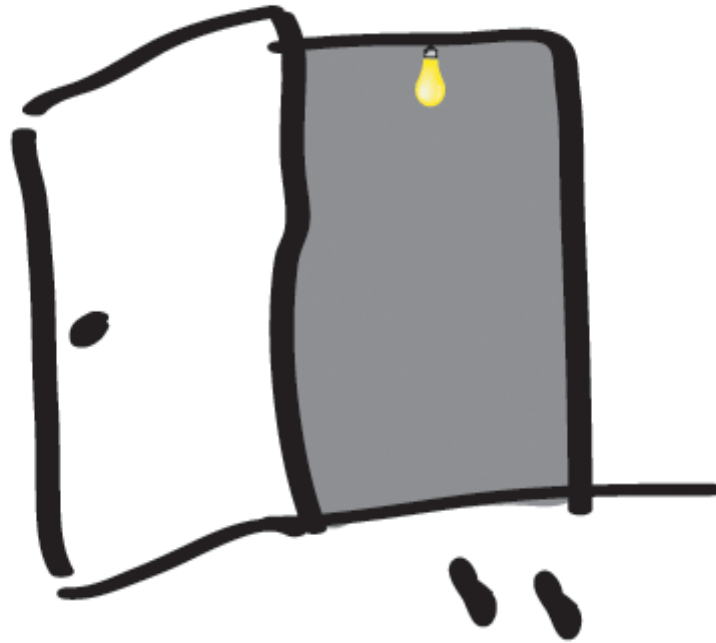


Coming Out.

a pamphlet from the



A simple guide for a complicated step.



Coming Out Packet

We know that the process of *coming out* involves some of the most important and difficult decisions to be made in the lives of bisexual, lesbian, transgender, and gay individuals. This packet is intended as an introductory resource for individuals who are contemplating *coming out* with their sexual orientation and who are in search of helpful material on the subject.

Coming out has often been identified “as a two-part process involving the acknowledgement of one’s sexual identity as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender internally—to oneself, and externally—to others.” (Evans & Broido, 1999) (2). It is important to understand that the *coming out* is a complex journey, that is experienced differently for everyone, and cannot be generalized down to a step by step process. This packet cannot possibly answer all of the questions that you may have about *coming out*, but we hope that it is an informative guide for you to reference when you are in need of some support and, as the case may be, advice.

While *coming out* is experienced differently for everyone, often varying in outcomes throughout one’s life, we hope that the packet serves to lessen any feelings of alienation and confusion that you might be experiencing. There is no right answer to whether or not you should come out, but we hope that the packet will help you to make an informed decision or, at least, lead you to other educational and/or supportive sources that may help you along the way.

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Overview to Coming Out

The First Big Decision

“Being attracted to someone of the same sex or understanding that your gender identity is different from your biological sex can be frightening — so much so that you may deny your feelings. Certainly, life is more challenging if you are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. You will be required to develop the courage to honor your own experience of love and self-identification above anyone else’s judgments about it” When and if you are ready, you can join the “millions of people” who have already *come out*, many of whom “say it was the best thing they ever did.” (1)

Choosing whether or not to *come out* is a big decision. “While some people believe that *coming out* is an essential developmental task that all GLBT people must complete, others recognize that *coming out* is a process that is often influenced by various life circumstances. In general, the decision to come out should be based on an individual’s appraisal of the potential costs and benefits of revealing one’s sexual identity within a variety of life roles (i.e. student, child, friend), rather than being viewed as an absolute indicator of self-acceptance (Green, 2000).” (2)

Pros and Cons of Coming Out

Indeed, *coming out* is different for everyone, significantly influenced by an individual’s various life circumstances. But as it is, there “are many good reasons to come out. It can be a tremendous relief to be open about your identity and to stop investing lots of energy in keeping secrets and worrying about what might happen if others “find out.” Being honest can help to bridge that distance you may have been keeping from friends and family, and can result in closer and more meaningful relationships with loved ones.” (3) Pros of *coming out* are that research “indicates that some of the benefits of *coming out* of the closet include an increased honesty and closeness with family and friends, self-affirmation, greater freedom, increased sharing, better mental health, feelings of pride, a sense of relief, the opportunity to develop relationships with other GLBT individuals, and the chance to make a political contribution.”(2) Also, some research shows that individuals who remain closeted share feelings of living a lie and experience “depression, awkwardness, shame, anxiety, increased stress, fear of being found out, self-censorship, and relationship strain.” (2)

However, it is important to know that there are cons involved. There are reasons that many people wait to come out to others. "If you are under 18 and/or financially dependent on others, you may not want to come out if there is a chance you will be kicked out of your home or left to fend for yourself. If you fear harassment, abuse, or loss of emotional support, this too may be reason to put off *coming out* until you are in a more secure position. If you are unsure about whether or not to come out, take your time and think things through rather than acting impulsively." (3) It is important to understand that not everyone who *comes out* has positive experiences. In fact, some people experience very negative responses, including rejection, harassment, and violence, as well as feelings of betrayal by those close to them, exploitation, and fear. If you are in a situation where you feel like you cannot *come out* to those people in your life, consider reading "books or magazines by and for LGBT youth. Watch a video about LGBT issues, join an online community, or call an LGBT hotline. If there is a youth group or trusted adult to whom you can safely and confidentially turn, take advantage of this option. You may also want to keep a daily journal of your reflections, questions, thoughts and fears until you are clear as to the right path for you. (3)

Coming Out as a Lifetime's Journey

It is important to understand that *coming out* "isn't a one-time event. It's a journey that lasts a lifetime." (1) That journey starts internally by *coming out* to yourself. The journey continues as you come out to friends and family, learning to be more open about your sexual orientation. "But *coming out* is more than just telling those close to you. It is a challenging process that continues throughout your life and across all of its facets...Many opportunities will arise where you will need to choose whether to come out as a gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender person — whether it's on the job, at a church picnic, while having a conversation on the bus or when filling out a form in your doctor's office. Almost daily, you will face having to make decisions about when and where to come out. But remember, take as much time as you need — this is your journey." (1) "There will always be new people and new situations in which you will have to decide whether or not to come out. Unfortunately there is no Magic Eight Ball to tell you "outlook good" or "very doubtful"—you will have to rely on your instincts instead." (3) "The good news is that, the more experience a person has with *coming out*, the easier it usually becomes. (2)

Basic Terminology

When *coming out*, it can be very helpful to be aware of the terminology that surrounds sexual and gender identities. Not all of the terms will apply to you, and it is extremely important to understand that sexuality can be fluid. Many people believe that labeling yourself and others is an act that puts harmful and fictitious limits on an individual's sexual experiences and expression. However, you might find some of the terminology surprising and informative. Also, understanding the definitions of the terms below may help to better your understanding of this packet and/or other LGBT sources and materials.

Terms to Know

HETEROSEXISM is the societal, cultural, institutional, and individual beliefs and practices that assume that heterosexuality is the only natural, normal, acceptable sexual orientation.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION is the desire for intimate emotional and sexual relationships with people of the same gender (lesbian, gay), the other gender (heterosexual), or either gender (bisexual).

HOMOPHOBIA is the fear, hatred, or intolerance of lesbians, gay men, or any behavior that is outside the boundaries of traditional gender roles. This can be manifested as fear of association with lesbian, or gay people, or being perceived as lesbian or gay.

HETEROSEXUAL PRIVILEGE is the benefits and advantages that heterosexuals receive in a heterosexist culture. Also the benefits lesbian, gay men, and bisexual people receive as a result of claiming heterosexual identity or denying homosexual or bisexual identity.

HETEROSEXUAL ALLIES are heterosexual people who confront heterosexism, homophobia, and heterosexual privilege in themselves and others, out of self-interest. These people are concerned for the well-being of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people and hold a belief that heterosexism is a social justice issue.

GENDER IDENTITY is one's psychological sense of one's self as male or female.

GENDER ROLES are the socially constructed and culturally specific behavior and appearance expectations imposed on women (femininity) and men (masculinity).

BIOLOGICAL SEX is the psychological and anatomical characteristics of maleness or femaleness with which a person is born.

LESBIAN is a term used to describe a woman who feels sexual desire and/or emotional attraction exclusively or predominately for other women.

GAY is a term that usually refers to a man who feels sexual desire and/or emotional attraction exclusively or predominately for other men. The term is also used, somewhat incorrectly, to describe bisexual individuals and lesbians.

BISEXUAL is a term used to describe an individual who has the potential for sexual attraction to both men and women. Some of bisexual people describe themselves as attracted to individuals rather than persons of a particular gender or biological sex.

HETEROSEXUAL broadly defines female-to-male or male-to-female emotional attraction, sexual desire and/or sexual behavior.

TRANSSEXUAL is a term used to describe a person whose biological sex does not match their gender identity and who, through gender reassignment surgery and hormone treatments, seeks to change their physical body to match their gender identity. His or her sexual orientation can be heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual.

TRANSGENDER PERSON is the term used to describe a person whose self-identification challenges traditional notions of gender and sexuality. This category includes transsexuals and other who do not conform to traditional understandings of labels like male and female or heterosexual and homosexual.

QUEER was originally a derogatory label used to refer to lesbian and gay people or to intimidate and offend heterosexuals. More recently, this term has been reclaimed by some lesbians, gay men, bisexual people, and transgender people as an inclusive and positive way to identify all people targeted by heterosexism and homophobia.

“Many people identify as gay or lesbian because their primary attractions — both emotional and physical — are to members of the same sex. Many people who are attracted to both men and women identify as bisexual. Some transgender people say they felt like they were trapped in the wrong body for as long as they can remember. And sometimes people don’t feel comfortable with any of these labels or they choose a mix of them. The important thing is to be honest with yourself and — when you’re ready — to be honest with others about who you are and to whom you are attracted. Figuring out who you are can be very difficult — and it can take time. Remember, however, that most of those negative stereotypes of GLBT people you may have heard are based on erroneous or inadequate information. And what you need are the facts.” (1)

Battling Assumptions

We aren’t all Straight: Being Raised In Heterosexist Society

“From birth, most of us have been raised to think of ourselves as heterosexual and as the gender that corresponds with our biological sex. Our parents, our families, our teachers, our friends — and seemingly our entire culture — told us that a day would arrive when we would meet someone of the opposite sex and get married. Very few of us are told that we might fall in love with someone of the same sex” (1). “You’ve probably heard some people say that men are “meant” to be with women, and women are

“meant” to be with men — or that you should be a “real man” or be more “feminine.” They may say that unless you are straight, you are going against nature and morality. But if being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender is unnatural, why would it occur, generation after generation, despite some cultures’ strong prohibitions? The fact is same-sex love and gender variance has occurred throughout history, in every nation and culture. They are natural variations among humans, and may have occurred somewhere in your own family’s history. When people say being GLBT is unnatural, they mean it is against their preconceived idea of, or conditioned assumptions about, what is natural” (1).

“How we identify and express ourselves sexually is far more complex and fluid than we are taught to believe. We are socialized to believe that the possibilities for how we identify ourselves are narrow and fixed. In actuality, there are many possibilities for the relationship among our biological sex, gender identity, gender roles, and sexual orientation” (Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice: A Sourcebook).

Being LGBT isn’t a Matter of Choice

Being lesbian, transgender, gay, or bisexual isn’t a matter of “choice,” but there are choices involved. “Some people say that sexuality or gender identity is a choice to discourage you from gay or lesbian relationships or from being comfortable with expressing your gender in the way that feels right to you. But think about it for a minute: Did you choose to have feelings of same-sex attraction? Did you choose your sex at birth? Sexuality and gender identity are not choices any more than being left-handed or having brown eyes or being heterosexual are choices. They are a part of who you are. The choice is in deciding how to live your life.” (1) The choices that you will make are whether or not to act on your desires, whether or not to be open about your feelings and/or relationships. You don’t just wake up and find yourself in a relationship. Everyone, including heterosexuals, makes choices that establish their sexual and gender identity. Keep in mind that your “choices” don’t make your identity any less real, any less “natural.” Your choices are just as real and “natural” as the choices made by heterosexuals. You are who you are, and it is likely that your attractions and feelings won’t go away. They are a part of you. You have the choice to hide and you have the choice to live and love honestly. That choice is yours.

“Homosexuality” isn’t a Disease

Anyone who says that homosexuality is a disease is wrong. “In the 1970s, the American Psychological Association and the American Psychiatric Association [national governing bodies for mental health service providers] revised their positions on homosexuality. Both determined that homosexuality is not a mental disorder” (1). There was a time when same-sex attraction was thought to be a mental illness, but “35 years of objective, well-designed scientific research has shown that homosexuality, in and of itself, is not associated with mental disorders or emotional or social problems...mental health professionals and society had biased information. In the past, studies of gay, lesbian and bisexual people involved only those in therapy, thus biasing the resulting conclusions. When researchers examined data about these people who were not in therapy, the idea that homosexuality was a mental illness was quickly found to be untrue” [The American Psychological Association’s website: www.apa.org] (2). “In 1994, The American Medical Association released a statement saying, ‘Most of the emotional disturbance experienced by gay men and lesbians around their sexual identity is not based on physiological causes but rather is due more to a sense of alienation in an unaccepting environment’” (1). “For more than 25 years, both associations have urged all mental health professionals to help dispel the stigma of mental illness that some people still associate with homosexual orientation.” [The American Psychological Association’s website: www.apa.org] (2) Some people might tell you that you are sick or that you need professional “treatment” to help you “change” your sexual orientation but there is absolutely no scientific, valid evidence to support these charges. In fact, the “most reputable medical and psychotherapeutic groups say you should not try to change your sexual orientation.” (1)

Taking the style out of “Lifestyle”

“It’s sometimes said that GLBT people live a gay “lifestyle,” a word chosen to trivialize us and to imply that all of us subscribe to the same values, characteristics and dreams. The fact is that the GLBT community is as diverse as the population at large. Some of us have one lifelong relationship; some have many relationships. We come from many different races and cultures. Some of us are liberal; some are conservative. Some are affluent; some are poor” (1). The media and pop culture oftentimes heighten this stereotype, portraying lesbians as hyper-masculine and man-hating, gay men as hyper-

feminine, promiscuous, style experts, and bisexuals as hyper-sexual. The transgender “lifestyle” is often ignored altogether, suggesting its nonexistence. It is important to understand the diversity among LGBT individuals, and that there is no common “lifestyle,” there only lives. There are certain cultures that flourish within active LGBT communities and there are people who do fit certain stereotypes. But the world, at large, is filled with stereotypes and sub-cultures, and we call this life. There is no LGBT lifestyle for you to follow or fall into; there is only your life ahead of you, filled with potential choices, growth, and lessons.

LGBT Individuals Make Great Parents

“Some people talk as if there are two options in life: You can marry someone of the opposite sex and become a family or you can be gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender and be excluded from the definition of family” (1). This is absolutely untrue. “Estimates of the number of lesbian or gay parents in the U.S. range from two to eight million...The percentage of lesbian couples raising children (34%) is not that much lower than the percentage of married opposite-sex households with children (46%) or the percentage of unmarried opposite-sex households with children (43%). Gay male couples parent at about half the rate of married couples (22% vs. 46%). Some estimates indicate that between six and 14 million children have at least one gay or lesbian parent. More conservative estimates find that between one and nine million children, ages 19 and under, are being raised by a gay or lesbian parent” (5). The point is that if you want to be a parent you can be, regardless of your sexual orientation.

“Many GLBT people have children through adoption, alternative insemination, surrogacy arrangements or previous relationships. In addition, scientific research to date has shown that children of gay and lesbian parents are as mentally healthy as children raised by heterosexual parents. Research collected on transgender parents shows that there is no evidence that a parent’s gender identity affects the gender identity of their children, according to the International Journal of Transgenderism (October 1998). Most important, parenting experts agree: Children need love and support. There’s no reason that GLBT parents cannot give their children the same support and love that heterosexual parents can. In 2002, the American Academy of Pediatrics came out in support of legal protections for same-sex parents and their children. The American Psychological Association, Child Welfare League of America and North American Council on Adoptable Children also have issued statements in support of gay and lesbian parents. However,

GLBT families often are not protected under law like married couples. Thus, there are special considerations for you to make when you decide to have a child or when you and your partner commit to one another" (1).

The Process of and Tips for Coming Out

Coming Out to Yourself

It is important to remember that *coming out* is not a once in a lifetime event but a lifetime journey. The first step of which, is *coming out* to yourself. There is no standard way or timeframe in which this happens. You may have been feeling unclear about your sexual orientation or gender identity for a long time, or maybe it is something that you are just now beginning to recognize. Because we have been raised in a society that minimizes the experiences and lives of LGBT individuals, many people who are *coming out* are only first realizing that their feelings are different from the people around them. Many people don't even recognize that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals exist outside of television and bad jokes. For them to then identify with something so mythological is, therefore, very difficult. Also, many LGBT people express that, prior to *coming out*, their feelings had been buried deep beneath the expectations of and learned relations in our heterosexist society. Still, others might be experiencing these desires or feelings for the first time in their lives. Others might feel excited to finally have come to terms with who they are. It is very important that you take time to process what you are feeling. When did you first become conscious of these feelings? Can you remember what triggered your feelings? Are you having doubts about the validity of your feelings? Is your outlook for this situation positive or negative? Do you think that you are going to get through this alone or do you need to seek support? These questions can be helpful as you sort through your feelings. Some people might feel uncertain, scared, or alone as they process through their feelings. There is no need to rush and there is no formula by which to follow. If you feel like you need to speak to someone during this process, you might want to speak to a LGBT-friendly counselor who could help you process through what you are feeling. Remember, you are the only one who knows what you are truly feeling and what is best for you do.

The Next Step

"*Coming out* can be a wonderful experience, but only when you are comfortable with your own identity and ready to share yourself with others" (3). For those individuals who have come out to themselves and are struggling with how and when to tell the people in their lives, it is important to remember that there "is no definitive roadmap for how and when to come out" (3) and every decision you make during your journey is yours to decide. For some people, *coming out* to others is one of the most challenging experiences in their life, especially for the first time. However, "there is lots of advice from those who have come out before you. Because *coming out* can be quite an emotional experience, some recommend writing a carefully worded letter that captures just what you want to say and gives the recipient time to absorb the news before meeting with you in person. Most people, however, do their *coming out* face- to-face. If this is your preferred approach, it is best to do a little planning ahead. It is usually easiest to come out privately to one person at a time (rather than to a group, say, at Thanksgiving dinner) and to avoid bringing a friend or lover to help you deliver the news. Choose a time and day when neither of you are tired or stressed, and when there is ample time to process and discuss things. Though it may help you to plan and rehearse exactly what you want to say in advance, try to avoid giving a speech and to make it more of a two-way conversation. Most importantly, don't ever come out because others are pressuring you to do so, when you aren't sober, out of anger, or as a weapon to hurt someone else." (3)

"Since *coming out* is first and foremost something that you are doing for yourself, don't let worries about potential reactions veer you from your course (unless you fear for your safety or security). If possible, choose people to tell who you expect will give you the support and encouragement you desire. For most of us, there will be a time when we need to come out to someone who may be less than compassionate. Many people will say things out of shock or discomfort that they may not mean or realize is hurtful. It is important to remember how long it took you to come to terms with your own identity, and to be patient with others who may need time to come around. Some of those people may be distant or detached at first, so prepare yourself to deal with possible silence. Others may challenge you with difficult statements or questions, so you may want to think about how to respond to issues such as religion, your sexual activity and HIV/health status, and your willingness to get reparative therapy. Whatever comes up, take solace in the fact that most people will grow to be accepting over time and that it is not your responsibility to change the few who will never open their minds. For those who

are willing to learn more suggest books, websites, or local groups (such as PFLAG). This will not only help them to educate themselves, but will take the pressure off of you to have all of the answers." (3)

"Some people come out when someone asks them if they're gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. Others make a point of pulling people aside and saying, 'There's something I have to tell you.' If you choose the latter option, ask yourself: 'Who is the most open-minded and caring person I know who is also the least likely to be shocked, threatened or put off?' This might be a friend, a relative or a teacher. Tell that person you have questions about your sexual orientation or your gender identity or that you're trying to be more honest and you'd like to talk. Say you've come to them because you trust them. You may want to consider talking to a school counselor, a supportive teacher, a member of a GLBT student group or a therapist. The student groups widely known as gay-straight alliances exist in a number of high schools and colleges — and often include straight students who are supportive of their GLBT and questioning classmates. Some large cities have GLBT community centers. In addition, several national hotlines are available." (1)

"Before deciding to come out to any important person in your life, it is essential that you consider both the potential costs and benefits of doing so. According to Green (2000), the choice to come out has five determinants:

- 1) The existing level of closeness and conflict in the relationship
- 2) The amount of contact with the individual in question
- 3) The importance of various types of support offered by the relationship (i.e. emotional or financial support)
- 4) The availability of other relationships in which similar support is available
- 5) An analysis of the potential benefits and risks of *coming out* based on the anticipated response of the individual in question. Although it is impossible to predict with any level of certainty how someone will respond to your revelation, it is helpful to be aware of the individual's general attitudes towards GLBT issues and identities. In addition, being aware of whether the individual tends to hold conservative political, religious, or world views can also help with anticipating his/her reaction (Green, 2000)." (2)

"It might also be helpful to get a sense of how the person you wish to come out to might react beforehand. For example, you might watch a TV show or movie that has gay characters and then discuss it. Be aware of what is going on in the life of the person you wish to tell and try to pick a time when he or she can be most supportive. Be prepared for a wide range of reactions. Your confidant may be shocked, angry or not surprised at

all. Remember how long it has taken you to come to terms with your sexual orientation or gender identity and give the person you are telling the same kind of time to adjust. Also, if you are still in school and want to confide in a teacher or counselor, first learn the school's confidentiality policy. Faculty or staff may be required to share the information you tell them with someone else." (2)

"Obviously, *coming out* isn't the same for each person. Everyone has their own experiences and background. For instance, it's a big risk to come out for transgender people, says Dana Rivers, who lost her job as a teacher when she came out. And, more than likely, transgender people cannot conceal who they are from people that knew them before transitioning. 'You just cannot hide what you are as a female-to-male or a male-to-female transsexual,' says Rivers. It can also be uncomfortable to be transgender in the gay community because some members remain ignorant of gender-related issues and fail to accept transgender people, she notes. What is key, however, is simply being authentic — when the time is right, Rivers says. 'Everyone needs to make their own decision about when to come out. It is important for people, especially those I am close to, to know about this dramatic, profound shift in my life.'" (1)

Coming out to Family/Friends

Coming out to close friends and family members can be extremely difficult for many individuals. Keep in mind that you "can get a sense of how accepting your friends and family are by the things they say, or don't say, when gay- or transgender-related issues come up. You might try to bring it up yourself by talking about such issues in the news, in films, on radio or television shows, or in the debates over equal rights in the workplace. If the reactions from your friends or members of your family are positive, the chances are that they'll be more accepting of you. But always keep in mind that it's easier for most people to accept GLBT people in the abstract. It's a bit different when it's 'my son' or 'my daughter' or even 'my best friend.' A word of caution: It's always a risk to come out. You never can know how anyone will react — because our society, throughout history, has been full of positive images of heterosexual people and bereft of positive images of GLBT people. There's a good chance that people will judge you based on those images, no matter how open-minded you might think they are. On the other hand, it is often surprising who among your friends and families are the most supportive."(1)

“Most people are afraid that their parents will reject them if they come out. You might be afraid that they will throw you out of the house, tell you you’re immoral, or simply stop loving you. The good news is that you’re probably wrong. It’s true that many parents are shocked when their children say they’re gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. But it is also true that for many parents, it’s very hard to completely reject their children. Some parents react in ways that hurt. Some cry. Some get angry. Some ask where they went wrong as a parent. Some call it a sin. Some insist it’s a phase. Others try to send their child to counselors or therapists who attempt to change gay people into heterosexuals — a process rejected by all major medical and mental health professional organizations. Some parents send their child to counselors or therapists who try to change gender-variant people.” (1)

“Remember that your parents grew up in a time when some of the misperceptions about GLBT people were more prevalent than they are today. Remember, too, that they’re probably trying to keep you safe from something they do not understand. Finally, remember this is big news, and there’s really no time schedule for how long it takes parents to adjust. Some take months. Some take years. And, of course, some already know. Many people have questions when you come out to them. You might want to be prepared by showing them this booklet or another similar resource. Remember this is big news, and there’s really no time schedule for how long it takes parents to adjust.” (1)

“The research that exists on issues of *coming out* can also be used to help you make an informed decision. Studies indicate that a high level of trust is necessary in a relationship where *coming out* is being considered (Miller & Boon, 2002). Research also shows that fathers tend to react more negatively to a child’s *coming out* than do mothers (D’Augelli, 2000). Sibling reactions tend to be more positive than parental reactions. In addition, it is helpful to know that if the relationship was generally positive prior to *coming out*, it is likely to remain so after *coming out* (Waldner & Magruder, 1999). Also, since being adequately informed about GLBT issues has been found to increase positive perceptions of GLBT individuals, it is recommended that you educate the person you are planning to come out to before *coming out* in order to pave the way to a positive response (Rhoads, 1995). Although it is impossible to predict what another’s reaction will be, it is possible and wise to consider how the recipient is likely to react based on what is known about the individual. Also, you should anticipate how you will manage the situation should the recipient react in a negative way” (2).

“For many people, *coming out* to parents or other close family members can be an intense experience (in a positive or negative way). For this reason, you may want to

consider 'practicing' on others who you trust before talking to your family, or getting the advice of LGBT people who can share what it was like to come out to family members. *Coming out* to family can be a source of great support or great angst— your decision about which family member to come out to when is a very personal decision that you should consider thoughtfully." (3)

Coming out at Work

"One of the biggest risks you may face is *coming out* on the job." (1) Making the decision to come out at work can be a difficult decision for many individuals because the reaction you receive "has the potential to affect your livelihood because there is no federal law that protects you from being fired merely because you're gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. Some employers have policies against such discrimination — but most do not. It's important to know the law in your state or city, and know your employer's policy before *coming out* at work. (1)

One of the biggest concerns "people have about *coming out* at work is losing their job. And this fear is legitimate, since in 38 states it is legal to discriminate against employees based on their sexual orientation. *Coming out* at work could open the door to blatant hostility, termination or being passed over for promotions." (6)

So what "possesses people to come out on the job when the potential risks are so great? According to Mills, those who feel safe enough to come out on the job often experience a more integrated and honest identity. The stress of living a dual life -- sometimes in, sometimes out -- can be exhausting. Worrying about being found out or accidentally slipping up when referring to a partner takes an emotional toll." (6)

Keep in mind that reactions "from coworkers or bosses can range from support and encouragement to shock and disapproval. It is important to assess "the nature of your workplace before deciding to come out. Consider your personal safety. If you are in an extremely homophobic, hostile environment, finding a new job may make more sense than *coming out* in your current one" (6). Consider "making a list of everyone in your workplace who has an effect on your job. Think about how each person might react upon learning of your sexual orientation. How important to your career are those who might react negatively? Is it realistic to think your job could be jeopardized, or is this fear more imagined? Taking an analytical approach to this process can help you get a clearer picture of what to anticipate." (6)

Health Concerns and Coming Out

“Being honest about your sexual orientation or gender identity can be a matter of life and death — or, at a minimum, essential to getting effective care and treatment. Some of the people who may most need to know the truth about your orientation or identity are your health care providers. *Coming out* to them can be hard, however, because inaccurate information exists across the medical community about the treatment of GLBT patients. A number of health care providers still mistakenly presume all patients are heterosexual. As a result, it can be awkward when a doctor or nurse asks whether you are sexually active and what kind of birth control you use. Their ignorance encourages many GLBT people to delay or avoid getting the care they need. And it keeps many from talking with their providers about promoting good health and preventing disease in an informed, open way. Transgender and transsexual people also need to be aware that many U.S. insurance companies exclude health care coverage to people who are undergoing medical sex reassignment. Disclosure about your transgender status may be risky if it becomes part of your medical record. Moreover, supportive health care providers face obstacles in giving care and treatment to transgender and transsexual people — who often have to pay for services routinely covered by insurance companies. If you are not ready to come out to your own health care provider, perhaps you would feel more comfortable talking with a gay-friendly one. Similarly, if you have a therapist, make sure he or she is knowledgeable about issues facing GLBT people. A number of providers remain ill-informed, particularly about transgender issues — and could give inaccurate or damaging advice.” (1)

Psychological health is important too. If you are struggling with *coming out* you may want to seek professional counseling or therapy. “Remember that the problems people have dealing with their sexuality come from society and its treatment of GLBT people — not from being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. It’s OK to seek help in dealing with the confusing feelings you may have about your sexual orientation or your gender identity. Understanding and being honest with yourself as well as *coming out* are critical milestones in life” (1). Some licensed counselors, therapists, and psychologists are LGBT friendly. If you are unsure that a particular practitioner is LGBT friendly, call ahead and ask anonymously. The counseling center on campus has many LGBT friendly counselors and student fees may cover your visits. Call 573-882-6601 to find out if you are eligible and make an appointment. As with any other significant step in your life, seeking professional help through this process is not only justified, but helpful. Just

remember: The anxiety you are feeling is primarily the result of family or social prejudice against GLBT people.” (1)

Coming Out: Great Additional Resources

Transgender Persons

GenderPAC www.gpac.org
International Foundation for Gender Education www.ifge.org
Transgendered Network International www.tgni.com
TransgenderCare www.transgendercare.com
Transgender Expressions www/tg2tg.org
Trans academics www.trans-academics.org/boards
Transgender Law www.transgednerlaw.org
National Center for Transgender Equality www.nctequality.org
National Transgender Advocacy Coalition www.ntac.org
HRC articles www.hrc.org search “coming out as transgender”

Gay Men

Coming Out and Staying Out <http://www.gmhp.demon.co.uk/coming-out/>

Lesbians

National Center for Lesbian Rights www.nclrights.org
Lesbian.com www.lesbian.com
Lesbian.org www.lesbian.org
Lesbian Alliance www.lesbianalliance.com
LesbiaNation www.lesbianation.com
National Organization of Women: Lesbian Rights www.now.org/issues/lgbi

Bisexuals

BiNetUSA www.binetusa.org
World Bisexual Community www.bi.org
Bisexual Resource Center www.biresource.org
Bi All Means www.biallmeans.org
All Things Bisexual www.allthingsbi.com

Queer Persons

Queer Resources Directory <http://www.qrd.org/qrd>

Race and Ethnicity

African Asian Latina Lesbians United celebratesisterhood.org
Black Women in Sisterhood for Action feminist.com/bisas1.htm
Blacklight www.blacklightonline.com
Blackstripe www.blackstripe.com
Black Lavendar: The Division www.blacklavender.com/index.html
GAPSN - Gay Asian Pacific Islander Men www.gapsn.org
Gay and Lesbian Arabic Society (GLAS) www.glas.org

Femmenoir - Web Portal for Lesbians of Color femmenoir.net
HRC- Human Right Campaign www.hrc.org
Immigration Equality Inc. www.lgirtf.org
Malejole - online community for LGBT of South Asia www.malejole.net
National Association of Black and White Men Together www.nabwmt.com
National Latino/a LGBT Organization www.llego.org
National Minority AIDS Council www.nmac.org
National Native American AIDS Prevention Center www.nnaapc.org/
Trikone - LGBT South Asians www.trikone.org
Zuna Institute - Advocacy for Black Lesbians www.zunainstitute.org

Religion

Al-Fatiha - Muslim LGBT www.al-fatiha.net
Affirmation: United Methodists for GLBT Concerns www.umaffirm.org
Affirmation: Gay and Lesbian Mormons www.affirmation.org
Apostolic Catholic Church in America www.apostoliccatholicchurchinamerica.org
Gay and Lesbian Vaishnava Association www.umaffirm.org
Gay WitchCraft www.witchvox.com/xgay.html
HRC- Human Rights Campaign www.hrc.org
National Association of LGB Episcopalians & Friends www.integrityusa.org
Sister Congregation - Jewish LGBT www.etz-chaim.com/sister1.htm
Twice Blessed - Jewish LGBT www.usc.edu/isd/archives/oneigla/tb/index.html

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- (4) Adams, Maurianne. Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice: A Sourcebook. Heterosexism Curriculum Design. Routledge. 1997. pg. 149.
- (5) National Gay and Lesbian TASK FORCE. *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Parents and Their Children*.
<http://www.thetaskforce.org/downloads/LGBTParentsChildren.pdf>
- (6) Bryant, Susan. "Coming Out at Work." *Monster*. 2005.
<http://diversity.monster.com/gale/articles/comingout/>