Create an LBGTQ Friendly Environment
(Adapted by Buhrke & Douce, 1991)

1. Object to and eliminate jokes and humor that put down or portray gay/bisexual men or lesbian/bisexual women in stereotypical ways.

2. Counter statements about sexual orientation that are not relevant to decisions or evaluations being made about faculty, staff, or students.

3. Invite "out" professionals to conduct seminars and provide guest lectures in your classes and offices. Invite them for both LGBTQ topics and other topics of their expertise.

4. Do not force LGBTQ persons "out of the closet" nor "out" them to others. The process of coming out is one of enlarging a series of concentric circles of those who know. The process should be in control of the individual until (and if) they consider it public knowledge.

5. Don't include sexual orientation information in letters of reference or answer specific or implied questions without first clarifying how "out" the person chooses to be in the specific process in question. Because your environment may be safe does not mean that all environments are safe.

6. Recruit and hire "out" LGBTQ staff and faculty. View sexual orientation as a positive form of diversity that is desired in a multicultural setting. Always question job applicants about their ability to work with LGBTQ faculty, staff, and students.

7. Do not refer all LGBTQ issues to gay or lesbian staff/faculty. Do not assume their only expertise is LGBTQ issues. Check with staff about their willingness to consult on LGBTQ issues with other staff members.

8. Be sensitive to issues of oppression and appreciate the strength and struggle it takes to establish a positive LGBTQ identity. Provide nurturing support to colleagues and students in phases of that process.

9. Be prepared. If you truly establish a safe and supportive environment, people that you never thought of will begin to share their personal lives and come out in varying degrees. Secretaries, maintenance personnel, former students, and professional colleagues will respond to the new atmosphere.

10. View their creation of this environment as a departmental or agency responsibility, not the responsibility of individual persons who happen to be gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender. Always waiting for them to speak, challenge, or act, adds an extra level of responsibility to someone who is already dealing with oppression on many levels.
Suggestions for Creating a Non-Homophobic Campus Environment  
(Adapted by Buhrke & Douce, 1991)

- Objects to and eliminate jokes and humor that put down or portray LGBTQ people in stereotypical ways.

- Counter statements about sexual orientation that are not relevant to decisions or evaluations being made about faculty, staff, or students.

- Invite "out" professionals to conduct seminars and provide guest lectures in your classes and offices. Invite them for both LGBTQ topics and other topics of their expertise.

- Do not force LGBTQ people out of the closet nor come out for them to others. The process of coming out is one of enlarging a series of concentric circles of those who know. Initially the process should be in control of the individual until (and if) they consider it public knowledge.

- Don't include sexual orientation information in letters of reference or answer specific or implied questions without first clarifying how "out" the person chooses to be in the specific process in question. Because your environment may be safe does not mean that all environments are safe.

- Recruit and hire "out' gay and lesbian staff and faculty. View sexual orientation as a positive form of diversity that is desired in a multicultural setting. Always question job applicants about their ability to work with LGBTQ faculty, staff, and students.

- Do not refer all LGBTQ issues to LGBTQ staff/faculty. Do not assume their only expertise is LGBTQ issues. Check with staff about their willingness to consult on LGBTQ issues with other staff members.

- Be sensitive to issues of oppression and appreciate the strength and struggle it takes to establish a positive LGBTQ identity. Provide nurturing support to colleagues and students in phases of that process.

- Be prepared. If you truly establish a safe and supportive environment, people that you never thought of will begin to share their personal lives and come out in varying degrees. Secretaries, maintenance personnel, former students, and professional colleagues will respond to the new atmosphere. Ten percent is a lot of people.

- View their creation of this environment as a departmental or agency responsibility, not the responsibility of individual persons who happen to be LGB or T. Always waiting for them to speak, challenge, or act, adds an extra level of responsibility to someone who is already dealing with oppression on many levels.
Part of what it means to be an Ally means creating a safe environment for LGBTQ clients. Here are some suggestions for how you can go about achieving this goal:

- **Create an LGBTQ Advocacy Team** – Find LGBTQ and heterosexual staff who are willing to provide PROACTIVE LGBTQ related programming and training at your school, university, organization, or agency.

- **Avoid and confront anti-gay jokes and conversations** – Such talk serves only to perpetuate heterosexism, even within the context of a counseling session. Be willing to confront your client if they make heterosexist comments/jokes. Violence starts with language. It also makes it more difficult for people to come to terms with their true identity.

- **Create an atmosphere of acceptance** – Display gay affirming pictures in your office, in the waiting area of the counseling center, hallways, cafeteria, etc.

- **Confront homophobic remarks, statements, or stereotypical comments** – Using words like “fag” or “dyke” should not be tolerated any more than racist or sexist language. The expression of an anti-gay/lesbian sentiment should not go unchallenged. Support acceptance and denounce homophobia, sexism, racism, and all forms of oppression. Homophobic language and jokes hurt people and can lead to oppression. Speak out...don’t be silent.

- **Safe Space emblem** – Display a Safe Space emblem in your office, office area, and/or in your classroom if you are teaching a course.

- **National Coming Out Day, October 11** – Publicly assist with creating and celebrating LGBTQ pride at your school or agency!

- **LGBTQ Resources** – Provide age appropriate LGBTQ books, magazines, and videos for clients and staff in your counseling centers.

- **Professional Development** – Provide periodic training on general sensitivity and how to incorporate diversity and social justice into the work environment.

- **Provide Inclusive Counseling Services** – Assess to ensure that your counseling center provides LGBTQ counseling services.

- **LGBTQ Support Group** – Create an LGBTQ support group at your agency or school.

- **LGBTQ Staff** – Hire “out” LGBTQ staff (counselors, teachers, administrators, etc.)

- **Be Unpopular** – Be willing to stand up against heterosexist status quo. Don’t be silent.

Source: Western Oregon University
Strategies for Educators and Staff Members

Teaching moments present themselves every day, take advantage of them.

- Identify lesbian/gay contributions throughout the curriculum. (History, art, science, literature, religion, etc.).
- Provide history of oppression. (Holocaust, origin of the word “faggot”).
- Submit request to improve library holdings (both fiction and non-fiction) related to sexual diversity.
- Make an effort to keep such materials up-to-date.
- Develop and/or advertise resources (i.e. support group) for lesbian/gay students and their families.
- Bring openly lesbian and gay adults as resources in classes or programs.
- Include lesbian and gay concerns in all prevention programs (suicide, dropout, pregnancy, etc.); and in training of peer leaders, student government, etc.
- Support your lesbian and gay colleagues.
- Policies: A. Schools are encouraged to develop policies protecting GLBT students from harassment, violence, and discrimination. B. Include “sexual and Gender Orientation as protected categories in your anti-discrimination policies. C. Extend “Domestic Partnership” benefits to GLBT employees on par with heterosexual employees.
- Schools are encouraged to provide affirming counseling for GLBT youth and their families.
- Schools are encouraged to recruit “open” GLBT faculty and staff to serve as supportive adult role models for all youth.
- Educate yourself to the needs and experiences of GLBT youth and their families.
- Support official university recognition and funding of GLBT organizations.

Source: Western Oregon University
"I want to be supportive but I don't know how."
"I don't know how to break the silence."
"I'm worried I'll say the wrong thing."

**Understanding the need to speak up.**

Many LGBTQ people feel like they must separate their home life from their work or school life because they are not sure they will be supported if they come out. Can you imagine what that would be like? No family photo on your desk. Evasive responses to questions like, "What did you do over the weekend?" Excuse after excuse for why you can't attend work parties. Often times LGBTQ people are looking to their co-workers and fellow students to show signs of support so they know it is an LGBTQ friendly environment.

**Using the correct words shows respect.**

Remember being gay is not a preference, a choice or an "alternative lifestyle." It's a sexual orientation. The only choice is whether or not to live openly and honestly.
Use gender neutral words whenever possible. For example: "Is there someone special you would like to bring to the party?"
Remember not to label people. Some terms like "homosexual," "tranny" and "queer" can be highly offensive to people.
Improve your knowledge of LGBTQ culture by reading, going to films or attending diversity courses.

**Learning how to speak up.**

Always assume there is an LGBTQ person or someone who cares about an LGBTQ person in the room. Always speak up, even if the person making the comment is an LGBTQ person. Our silence can be interpreted as consent.
Personalize your comment. Say "I don't find that funny" or "that's not ok with me."
Don't blame. Be clear. Don't back down.
Practice. Practice. Practice. It can be scary at first, but speaking up is so important. The more you do it the easier it gets. Once you start speaking up you'll be surprise at how many of your coworkers/fellow students support you.

"They always say time changes things, but you actually have to change them yourself." -Andy Warhol
Myths and Realities of Bisexuality

Human sexuality functions on a continuum. It is not a static "thing", but rather has the potential to change throughout one's lifetime and varies infinitely among people. Bisexuality exists at many points along the sexual continuum.

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

*Reality:* Some people go through a transitional period of bisexuality on their way to adopting a lesbian/gay or heterosexual identity. For many others, bisexuality remains a long-term orientation. For some bisexuals, homosexuality was a transitional phase in their coming out as bisexuals. Many bisexuals may be confused. They live in a society where their sexuality is denied by homosexuals and heterosexuals alike, but that confusion is a function of oppression cultural forces. Fence-sitting is a misnomer; there is no "fence" between homosexuality and heterosexuality, except in the minds of people who rigidly divide the two into an all or nothing perspective.

*Myth:* 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.

*Reality:* Whether an individual is an "experimenting heterosexual" or a bisexual depends on how s/he defines her/himself, rather than on some external standard. While there certainly are people for whom bisexual behavior is trendy, this does not negate the people who come to a bisexual identity amidst pain and confusion and claim it with pride.

*Myth:* Bisexuality doesn't really exist. People who consider themselves bisexuals are actually lesbian/gay, but haven't fully accepted themselves and finished coming out of the closet (acknowledging their attraction to people of the same gender.)

*Reality:* Bisexuality is a legitimate sexual orientation. Many bisexuals are completely out of the closet, but not necessarily in the way they are expected to be: exclusively homosexual or heterosexual. Bisexuals in this country share with lesbians and gays the debilitating experience of heterosexism (the assumption that everyone is heterosexual and thereby rendering other sexual identities invisible) and homophobia (the hatred, fear, and discrimination against homosexuals.)

*Myth:* Bisexuals are shallow, narcissistic, untrustworthy, hedonistic, and immoral.

*Reality:* This myth reflects our culture's ambivalence over sex and pleasure. The "sex" in bisexuality gets overemphasized, and our culture projects onto bisexuals its fascination with and condemnation of sex and pleasure.

*Myth:* Bisexuals are equally attracted to both sexes. Bisexual means having concurrent lovers of both sexes.

*Reality:* Most bisexuals are primarily attracted to either men or women, but do not deny the lesser attraction, whether or not they act on it. Some bisexuals are never sexual with women, or men, or either. Bisexuality is about dreams, desires, and capacities to form emotional and psychological bonds with others as much as it is about the sexual
behaviors. Bisexuals are people who can have lovers of either sex, not people who must have lovers of both sexes. Some bisexual people may have concurrent lovers, but bisexuals do not need to be with both sexes in order to feel fulfilled.

**Myth:** Bisexuals are promiscuous hypersexual swingers who are attracted to every woman and man they meet. Bisexuals cannot be monogamous, nor can they live in traditional committed relationships. They could never be celibate.

**Reality:** Bisexual people have a range of sexual behaviors. Like lesbians, gays, or heterosexuals, 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.

**Myth:** Bisexuals spread AIDS to the lesbians and heterosexual communities.

**Reality:** The myth above allows discrimination against bisexuals to be legitimized. The label "bisexual" simply refers to sexual orientation. It says nothing about whether one practices safe 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" AIDS.

**Myth:** Politically speaking, bisexuals are traitors to the cause of lesbian/gay liberation. They pass as heterosexual to avoid trouble and maintain heterosexual privilege.

**Reality:** Obviously there are bisexuals who pass as heterosexual to avoid trouble. There are also many lesbians and gays who do this as well. 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 as it is for a lesbian or gay person. Politicized bisexuals remain aware of heterosexual privileges and are committed enough to lesbian/gay/bisexual rights not to just abandon lesbian/gay communities when in heterosexual relationships.

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

**Reality:** Although this does sometimes happen, one can also find examples of bisexual women who have good long-term relationships with women. There are bisexuals for whom bisexuality is a phase; there are also lesbians for whom lesbianism is a phase. There are bisexual and lesbians 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 with a woman or a man 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 relationship in particular may face, the notion that bisexual women can't handle lesbian relationships is just a stereotype.

**Myth:** Bisexuals get the best of both worlds and a doubled chance for a date on Saturday night.

**Reality:** Combine our society's extreme heterosexism and homophobia with lesbian and gay hesitance to accept bisexuals into their community, and it might be more accurate to say that bisexuals get the worst of both worlds. As to the doubled chance for a date theory, that depends more upon the individual's personality then it does upon her/his bisexuality. Bisexuals don't radiate raw sex any more than lesbians, gays, or heterosexuals. If a bisexual person has a hard time meeting people, his or her bisexuality won't help much.
Myth: Bisexuals are desperately unhappy, endlessly seeking some kind of peace that they can not ever find.
Reality: Similar to gays or lesbians, bisexuals can live satisfying and fulfilling lives.

Adapted from Vernon A. Wall and Nancy J. Evans "Using Psychological development theories to understand and work with gay and lesbian persons" in Nancy J. Evans and Vernon A. Wall (eds.) Beyond Tolerance: Gays, Lesbians and Bisexuals on Campus, American College Personal Association, 1991.

Resources on Bisexuality

ROBYN’S WORKING DEFINITION OF BISEXUALITY:
“I call myself bisexual because I acknowledge in myself the potential to be attracted, romantically and/or sexually, to people of more than one sex, not necessarily at the same time, not necessarily in the same way, and not necessarily to the same degree.”
(in Getting Bi: Voices of Bisexuals Around the World, p. 9)

MARY HEATH: “Many of us experience choosing bisexual identity as a homecoming. It allows us to name feelings, experiences, and self-understandings as part of a whole, rather than demanding that we attempt to understand ourselves or explain ourselves to others as sometimes one thing and sometimes another. In a sense, it is a choice in the direction of unification, exactly the opposite of being split.”
(in Getting Bi: Voices of Bisexuals Around the World, p. 112)

WEBSITES:
www.biwomenboston.org, and/or subscribe to the newsletter. It’s FREE.
Biyouth.org ** Biresource.net ** BiNETUSA.org ** Bisexual.org

RECOMMENDED BOOKS:
ANTHOLOGIES:


COUNSELING BISEXUALS


RESEARCH:


*The Journal of Bisexuality* (Routledge): www.tandf.co.uk/journals/WJBI

OTHER:


And you can find many of Robyn’s articles, and an annotated listing of books about bisexuality or with bi characters and/or content on her website: www.robynochs.com.

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