

Child & Adolescent Sexual Development: Sexual Orientation and Society

Grades 11 and 12, Lesson #5

Time Needed

One class period without video or panels; two or more, with them

Student Learning Objectives

To be able to...

1. Describe ways in which harassment, violence and discrimination in general hurt us all: the hater, the hated, and the observer.
2. Understand the experience of growing up gay, lesbian or bisexual in a world in which your people are feared and hated.
3. Describe the role of “ally” to a gay, lesbian or bisexual friend or family member.

Agenda

1. Explain the lesson’s purpose and relevance.
2. Personalize the issue and address key concepts (prejudice, discrimination, “*allies*”). These tasks can be accomplished in one or more of three ways:
 - a. Use the stars-&-triangles exercise, the monologue “Southpaw: An Allegory”, and the Worksheet.
 - b. Show, discuss the video.
 - c. Invite a panel or panels.
3. Summarize the lesson.

Materials Needed

Student Materials:

- *Sexual Orientation Worksheet* (1 per student)

Classroom Materials, equipment:

- *Star* (p. 5-8), copied onto yellow paper (6 per class)
- *Triangle* (p. 5-9), copied onto pink, red, purple and blue paper (about 6 of each color, totaling 1 Star or Triangle per student)
- masking tape (optional)
- left-handed scissors (1 class set, optional)
- DVD/video (optional) ... Some of the best titles for this purpose, for grades 11/12, as of this printing, are:
 - *Brother Outsider: The Life of Bayard Rustin* – openly gay African-American civil rights pioneer
 - *Coming Out, Coming Home: Asian and Pacific Islander Family Stories* – coming out to family
 - *Lipstick* – what it means to be a friend and ally, as told through a compelling story
 - *Just Call Me Kade* – transgender teen's real life story
 - *Dealing with Difference: Opening Dialogue about Lesbian, Gay & Straight Issues* – teaches ally skills
 - *Queer Spawn* – real stories of teens and young adults with gay or lesbian parents

We recommend checking the Safe Schools Coalition web site for more detailed descriptions of these films, ordering information, and more recent releases:

http://www.safeschoolscoalition.org/RG-teachers_highschool.html

Activities

1. Explain the lesson's purpose and relevance.

We have studied the facts about sexual orientation, and homosexuality in particular. Today we'll focus, not so much on facts, but on feelings and the issue of discrimination.

- *Today, those of you who are heterosexual will have a chance to think about what it might feel like to have grown up gay, lesbian or bisexual in a world that doesn't understand your people ... a world filled with fear and hatred.*
 - *Those of you who are gay, lesbian or bisexual will have an opportunity to consider your own feelings about your sexual orientation and about handling of prejudice.*
 - *We'll all consider what I call "ally skills" ... how to stand up for someone in the face of prejudice ... how to come away from an incident without getting assaulted and yet with your pride intact.*
 - *The homework assignment you received from Lesson 4 will give you a chance to consider and express some of your beliefs about various related moral issues.*
2. Personalize the issue of sexual orientation and help students understand the experience of those who are gay, lesbian or bisexual. Also introduce the concepts of *stereotyping*, *prejudice*, *discrimination* and *allies*. These tasks can be accomplished in one or more of three ways:
 - a. **Use the stars-&-triangles exercise**, the monologue "*Southpaw: an Allegory*" and the *Sexual Orientation Worksheet*.
 - b. **Use a DVD/video**
 - c. Have as guest speakers a **panel** of persons who:
 - consider themselves gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender (GLBT), or
 - are parents or children or other family members of GLBT people.

These three alternative activities are elaborated below.

- 2a. **How to use the stars-&-triangles exercise, monologue and worksheet:**

Hand each student a simple line-drawing of a Holocaust symbol (a Star-of-David or a triangle) to cut out. Approximately one-fifth of the class should get stars (which you have photocopied onto yellow paper, to represent those that Jewish people in Nazi-occupied countries were made to sew to their clothing). One-fifth of the class should get triangles on pink paper (people believed to be homosexual were made to wear pink triangles), one-fifth purple triangles (Jehovah's Witnesses were made to wear them), one-fifth blue (emigrants, people who tried to escape from occupied countries, were made to wear them), one-fifth red (political prisoners were made to wear them).

Don't identify the meaning of the symbols yet.

Then give each student a pair of left-handed scissors, without identifying them as such. Have people cut out their symbols.

If scissors are unavailable, just ask everyone to write on their symbol, using their left hands, the sentence: **“Of course, everyone is left-handed.”**

While students are cutting out (or writing on) their symbols, introduce the concept of prejudice by engaging in a little theatre. Read the monologue entitled *“Southpaw, an Allegory”* aloud.

Debrief the monologue in one of two ways:

- Conduct a structured writing exercise: Hand out the *Sexual Orientation Worksheet* and give students 15 minutes to write their thoughts (not for a grade — in fact, we would encourage you **not** to have them hand in their responses to you (to increase their willingness to be honest about their prejudices) — but simply for participation points when you see that they are completing the worksheet), or
- Use the questions from the worksheet as discussion questions to address the group’s feelings, questions, critiques of the analogy in the fable.

Provide closure by taping a cut-out symbol to your own shoulder ... and by explaining briefly the significance of the symbols:

In the years leading up to World War II, and during the War, whenever Hitler occupied a country, certain of its citizens were forced to sew symbols to their clothing to identify their lower-class status. Eventually, each group was taken to prison camps and put to death. For example, Jewish people were made to wear yellow Stars-of-David. Gay people, or those believed to be gay, were made to wear pink triangles. Political prisoners were forced to wear red triangles. Emigrants, people caught trying to escape their homelands, had to wear blue triangles. Jehovah’s Witnesses were forced to wear purple triangles.

Denmark, however, refused to cooperate in genocide. When Hitler announced that Jewish Danes would have to sew the yellow Star of David to their clothing, the King of Denmark is believed to have objected. He said that he didn’t think people’s religion had anything to do with their ability to be good Danish citizens. In protest, he sewed the Star to his own clothing. There is safety in numbers; most of the Danish people followed his example and expressed their solidarity with their Jewish friends and neighbors by sewing Stars on their own clothing ... thus saving the lives of thousands of Danish Jews.

I have masking tape in case anyone would like to wear the symbol you cut out (or wrote on). You might wear it as an expression of your belief in the importance of diversity, or as a sign that you want to work on noticing your own prejudices, or to show that you are committed to interceding when you see harassment and discrimination.

2b. Using a film.

ALWAYS PREVIEW FILMS before showing them and make sure you have school district approval. Introduce a video by describing it very briefly and suggesting one or two things to look for as students watch.

Some of these films come with discussion guides. If the one you are using doesn’t, think ahead of time about two or three open-ended questions that will help students to:

- notice their own (perhaps mistaken) preconceptions and
- articulate this lesson's main concepts: prejudice, discrimination, why people come out (or feel they can't) and what it means to be an ally.

2c. Using a panel:

There are a number of appropriate panelists:

- **gay, lesbian and bisexual young adults** (In the Seattle area, call either the American Friends Service Committee, Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/Transgendered Youth Program, at 206-632-0500, ext 13, or the Bisexual, Gay and Lesbian Adolescent Drop-in, B-GLAD, group in Bellevue, at 425-747-4937 to arrange a panel.)
- **parents, children and other family members of gay, lesbian, and bisexual young adults.** (Call your local chapter of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, a support organization of friends and family members. The Seattle area number is 206-325-7724; the national number, to direct you to the nearest local group, is 202-467-8180.)

Panels can reinforce or even create new stereotypes if they are not very diverse. Try to invite speakers with a variety of life experiences, cultural perspectives, religious backgrounds, etc.

Recognize that a panel, while potentially your most valuable tool for debunking myths and demystifying the issue, may raise some community concerns. Therefore it is essential that you know your district's policies about guest speakers and that you clear the decision with your principal or building manager.

If you invite a panel, we suggest you introduce them in the following way:

Today's guests are here to share their stories ... to help us understand what it is like to be gay, lesbian, or bisexual (or a parent of a gay, lesbian, or bisexual youth; or a counselor for gay, lesbian, and bisexual young people). They will tell us a little about themselves, and about when and how they found out about sexual orientation issues and what life has been like since then. You are welcome to ask questions. I have already explained our class' ground rules to the panelists:

- that they have the right not to answer any questions they choose not to,
- that we've all made a serious commitment
 - ...to protect one another's confidentiality
 - ...to respect one another's right to differing opinions and
 - ...to try to protect one another's feelings
- and that these ground rules apply to (and protect) them as well.

3. Summarize the lesson with a "read-around" of **Coming Out**. Invite volunteers to take turns reading the handout aloud.

Close with your personal perspective as an ally, whether it is as a man who speaks out against sexism or an American citizen who objects to anti-immigrant prejudice or a straight person who says something when people use limp-wristed gestures. Tell a personal story.

MONOLOGUE: Southpaw, an Allegory

There's something important about me I want to share with you today. You don't know this about me, not because I've lied about it, or even actively hidden it; I just don't talk about it much because it's kind of scary: I'm left-handed.

I don't talk about it much, or use my hands much, around right-handed people. I tell myself 'It's nobody's business. It's private and why do you have to show it?' But then I realize right-handed people show their handedness openly all the time. They write in public. They raise their hands in class. They'll walk into a room of strangers and boldly stick out their right hands to shake.

Why don't I just offer my left hand as glibly? Well, I've seen lefties get 'looks' all my life. Once when a friend of my parents offered his left hand to shake, my parents went on and on after he left about why he made such a point of making them uncomfortable, of 'flaunting his preference.' Plus, it's no fun to be different. I noticed very young that all the tools seemed to be made for righties, all the scissors, all the desks. I saw that all the people on TV, in magazine ads, even in my family, used their right hands ... except a few who were the butt of jokes. You've all heard those jokes and putdowns about 'southpaws.' You don't want to be weird like the people they laugh about.

You know, I didn't choose to be different. It just feels more natural using my left hand. It always has, as far back as I can remember. I tried to change, when I began to realize I was different; I really did. For a while, I did use my right hand the most, but it never felt right. It never felt normal. It felt dishonest.

Even now, I sometimes offer my right hand when people want to shake, just because it's easier, but it feels like a lie. I feel sort of crummy about myself when I do. More often, I pretend not to notice when people offer to shake hands. And in class, I mostly listen and try to remember the important points, rather than take notes publicly with my left hand. In the cafeteria, I get milkshakes with a straw, so I can sit them on the table and not use either hand.

For a long time I felt very alone. I didn't think I knew another lefty in the whole world ... until I realized the others were just avoiding using their hands in public ... the same as I was! When I finally got to talk with other lefties, I found they'd been there all along: ten percent of my family, my friends, my neighbors. It was so exciting to discover they'd felt the same hurts and met the same challenges as I had! And many felt truly at peace with their handed-ness. Some were living full, happy, productive lives as lefties.

You probably wonder why I'm sharing all this today. I guess there are a number of reasons.

First, I know that some of you thought you'd never met a lefty before today. You have, of course, but you didn't know it at the time. I want you to have a chance to get to know me a little as a person; being left-handed is an important part of me, but it is only a part.

Second, some of you who are right-handed suffer because of hand prejudice, too. You may be careful not to ever use your left hands in public, even when your right hands are busy, for fear people will think you're really a lefty. You may feel bad when you overhear put-downs and don't know what to say. You end up feeling ashamed for not sticking up for what you believe and I want to help you learn how to act as proud allies, instead.

Third, I feel an obligation to make sure that young left-handed people know there are happy, successful lefties out here.

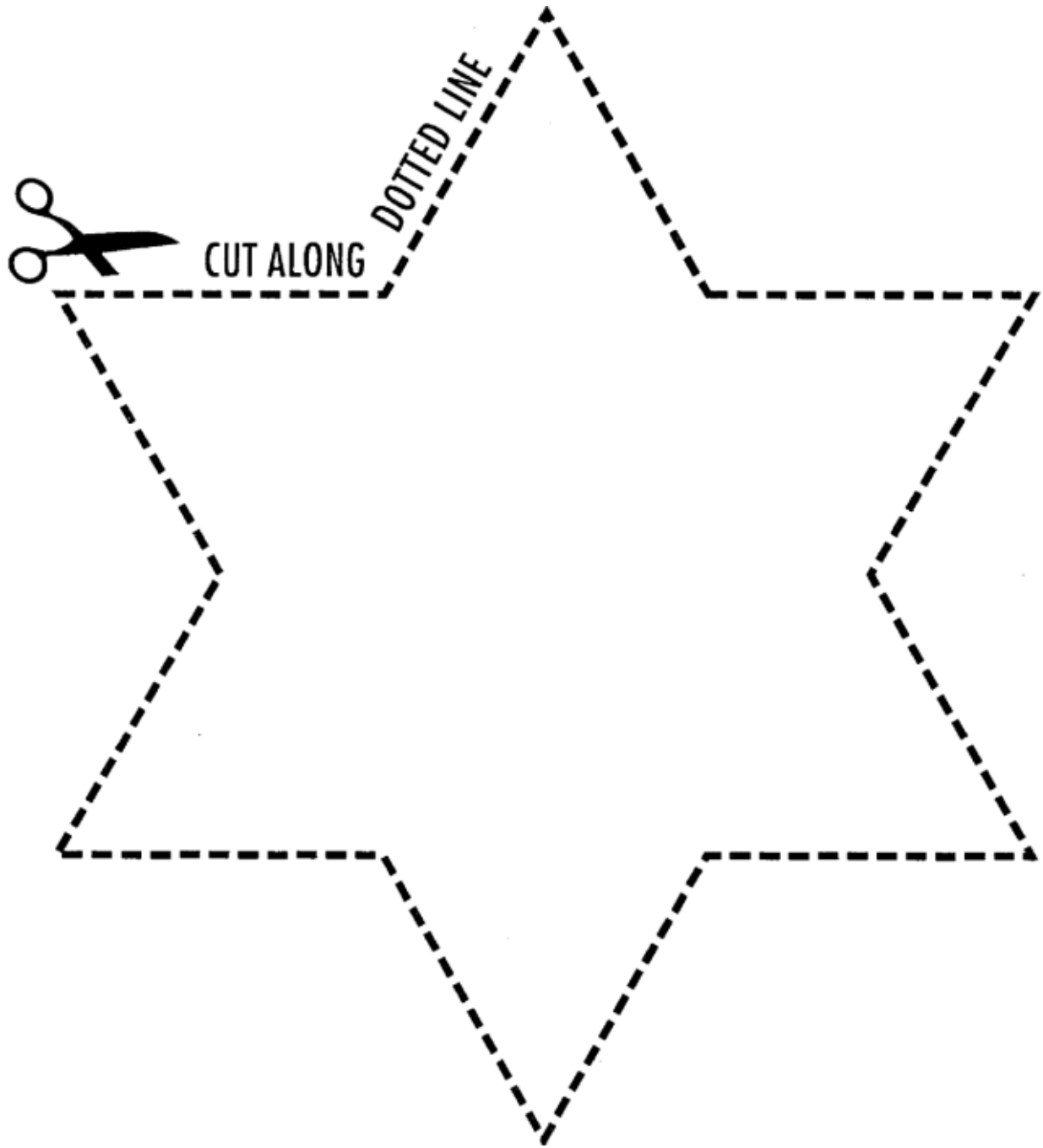
And, most important, I want to protect those young people from the harassment and isolation I grew up with.

But that doesn't mean I would ever try to 'convert' or 'recruit' a right-handed young person into a lefty. It probably wouldn't work if I did try. And it would hurt. Teachers used to try the opposite: to make left-handed kids learn to write with their right hands ... until it was found that this pressure caused some severe reading and learning problems. So it would be wrong to try to change another person. Besides, it's just a myth that left-handed people are into recruiting right-handed people.

There have been a lot of myths and stereo-types about us throughout history. One myth is that everyone is either left-handed or right-handed! I have one friend who is ambidextrous: equally at ease using either hand. I have another friend who is mostly a righty, but who bats and catches left-handed. Not everybody is completely one or the other; people are more complex than that. What are some other myths? Some religions used to teach that lefties were possessed by the devil. Now, most religious groups would say that's ridiculous. Psychiatrists once thought that all lefties were mentally ill. Today, many would say that's just as silly. People used to think all left-handed folks had to dress and act certain ways. Now we know that's not true. Yes, some lefties act 'different,' but many live lives very much like righties' lives ... so much so that you don't notice us. Many of us, in other words, are invisible. That's not to disparage those who do act or dress 'different;' they are my brothers and sisters, too. But you need to understand that only a few of us fit the stereotypes.

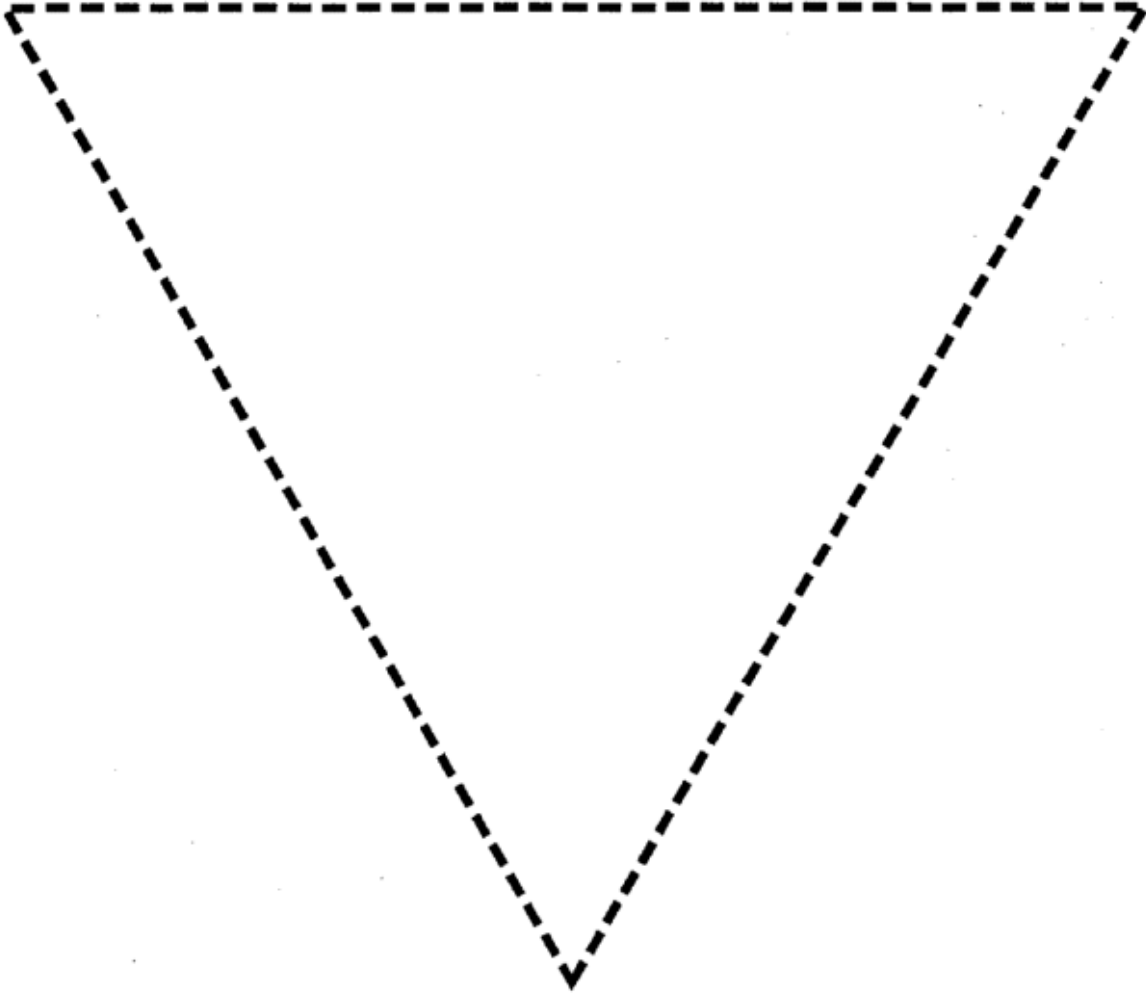
We can end prejudice against left-handed folks. We can learn to love and respect our brothers and sisters of both handednesses. We can teach our children that hate hurts us all: the haters and the hated. And that there is nothing to fear. Left-handed people don't want to make you into lefties. We won't take over the world.

It just feels more natural to us when we use our left hands. That's all.





CUT ALONG DOTTED LINE



Sexual Orientation & Discrimination Worksheet

For use with “*Southpaw: An Allegory*”

This will not be handed in or graded; you get credit just for doing it.

Using a separate sheet of paper, answer any 4 (at least) of these 8 sets of questions.

1. Are you left-handed or right-handed? How did it feel drawing with your left hand or using the left-handed scissors? Can you think of parallels to the scissors ... ways our culture is tailored to heterosexual people so that gay and lesbian people are just expected to adapt in silence? Give some examples.
2. I said I'd heard “southpaw” used to make people feel bad. You've probably heard jokes and putdowns about gay and lesbian people. Give some examples of the kinds of words and non-verbal behaviors you've seen used to hurt gay, lesbian or bisexual people. How have you felt when you've heard or seen these things? How have you handled the situation? How would you have liked to handle it? Have you used anti-gay slurs or gestures yourself? How did others react?
3. I said I had tried to change, to use my right hand. Some people who feel mostly attracted to others of their own sex try to ignore their feelings, too. They may try to make themselves fall in love with someone of the other sex ... or at least “act as if” they feel attracted when they don't. A few actually say they have changed, through therapy or religious experiences. Why do you suppose some people want to change? Others say that—even if there were a magic pill one could take to change his or her sexual orientation—they wouldn't want to. Why do you suppose they might want to stay who they are?
4. Think about the handshake issue. Was my parents' friend wrong to offer his left hand in a handshake ... to “make them uncomfortable and flaunt his preference”? Why did it seem to my parents that he was “flaunting” or pushing? Have you heard similar comments about gay or lesbian people who tell someone that they are gay? What's “flaunting” and what's honesty?
5. Some people, of course, don't tell anyone. That's sometimes called “staying in the closet”. When I stopped trying to change my handedness, I just stopped using my hands altogether in public most of the time. That way people would assume I was

right handed, without my actually lying. Similarly, a lot of gay, lesbian and bisexual people just let folks assume they are heterosexual. Why do you think people assume that? Why do you think people just let others assume it? How would it feel to keep your feelings so private? How would it feel to actively hide or lie about your crushes, attractions, boyfriend/girlfriend, life partner, etc.?

6. Why do you suppose some people are open about being gay, lesbian or bisexual? Do you think they are right or wrong to be open about their feelings and identities?
7. I said that, for a while, I thought I was the only lefty in the world. A lot of young people who are gay, lesbian or bisexual think the same way. If your friend were gay, lesbian or bisexual, and was feeling all alone, what could you suggest?
8. I talked about two ways righties get hurt by hand-prejudice: (1) they may be afraid to use their left hands ever, for fear they'll be labeled and (2) they may feel crummy when they don't interrupt attacks on lefties. Do you think heterosexuals get hurt by anti-gay fear or prejudice ("homophobia")? How?

Coming Out

from the Safe Schools Coalition

www.safeschoolscoalition.org

WHY do people come out as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT)?

Some people don't have any choice. Somehow they've been recognizable as LGBT since they were infants. Their most natural, honest gender expression differed enough from their culture's stereotypes that they were "out" before they knew themselves.

But other gay, lesbian, bi (and some trans) people are not particularly different from heterosexual non-transfolk in their gender expression or, at least, they fall somewhere within an acceptable range of "normal" gender roles for their culture at their time in history. And they may *decide* to come out. Why? For all kinds of reasons:

1. Because it feels phony to pretend to be someone you're not and nobody can get really close to you when you're pretending.
2. Because you can't tell whether the people who love you are just loving your mask or the real person behind it. So it's lonely.
3. Because it isn't fair that other people can have boyfriends or girlfriends and you can't or that other people can walk and talk and sit the way they like while you may have to watch every move you make.
4. Because watching every move you make can be exhausting; it can sap emotional energy that could otherwise go into being a better student or better at your job.
5. Because you may feel as if you're betraying your people by not standing with someone who's harassed or discriminated against for being lesbian, gay, bi or trans.
6. Because it may mean preventing yourself from hanging out with people who have this important thing in common with you, if you're worried that people will see you with them.
7. Because the opposite of coming out is actively hiding, an act of fear or shame. And at some point, as your fear and shame diminish and your confidence and self-respect grow with maturity, it just makes sense to stop hiding.
8. Because your health care providers and counselors can provide you the best of care when they know your whole biological, emotional, social self.
9. Because ... it's "a powerful thing you can do" for the movement. Public opinion polls find that people who realize that they know someone LGBT are more likely to support laws and policies of equality. You can correct people's stereotypes, assuage their fears and open their hearts.
10. Because it's a powerful thing you can do in support of those who aren't ready to be open yet, letting yourself be a role model, demonstrating that there are healthy,

happy, “normal” LGBT people in the world ... even people of your particular race, age, disabilities, etc.

11. Because nobody should have to pretend to be someone else in order to get an education, hold a job, get respectful health care, or be loved by their family.

But know that it is also OK to work for human rights in quieter ways if it isn't **safe** to be "out" at this point in your life or in your particular home or work environment. So if your school is a dangerous place, if you are pretty sure your family would kick you out or beat you up, if you can't afford the emotional or practical costs of coming out right now, know that you are entitled to walk the journey at your own pace. Nobody else gets to decide **for** you when the costs of silence outweigh the risks of openness. Don't let people guilt-trip you into taking steps you aren't ready for. Someday you will find peace in bringing your whole self to work or school and especially sharing your honest, unmasked self with the people who love you. Until then, know that your life is still a gift to the world. And there are still actions you can take to end homophobia!

Nobody should allow someone else's enthusiasm about human rights activism to pressure them into coming out before they're ready. We're each on our own personal journey!!

What is an ally? A member of a historically more powerful identity group who stands up against bigotry. For example, a man who confronts his friend about harassing women, a Christian who helps paint over a swastika graffiti, or a heterosexual person who objects to an anti-gay joke.

WHY do people come out as heterosexual allies (or as children or other family members or friends) of LGBT people?

1. Because sometimes allies have more clout than members of a targeted group in moving people's hearts. They aren't perceived as "having an ax to grind."
2. Because they can; they have heterosexual privilege. It may be safer for them to do this work than it might be for an LGBT person. They are less likely to get beat up, kicked out of their homes, lose a job or otherwise pay a price for speaking up.
3. Because it just seems unfair to them that *they* can hold hands with their girlfriend in public, or put their husband's picture on their desk at work, or join the military and live on base with their family, or get married, but their sister or dad or whomever they care about who's LGBT can't do the same.

What will you do to stand up to bullying and meanness ... no matter who is targeted?

