

LGBT Adolescence: Exercises in Rewriting Narratives

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Objectives

- Determine story(ies) you want to write
- Overview some cultures' stories about LGBT
- Gather some facts about LGBT
- Understand unconscious bias
- Explore power of narrative construction for individuals, groups, culture
- Engage in narrative writing and rewriting exercises
- Commit to writing, rewriting exercises

Warm-up: Narrative in this Workshop

- Please share something about yourself
- What drew you to the day long session?
- What do you want to do with what you learn?
- How will you know if you have been successful?
- Who will notice if you are successful?

What is sexual orientation? What is gender identity?

Why is increased LGBT awareness critical today?

- Teens are coming out earlier today
 - '70s: people came out in their 30s (if at all)
 - Now: kids come out as young as 11(or earlier)
 - Trans kids come out later, often from 15 on
 - Kids are more comfortable describing transgender feelings
- Children usually feel first "crush" about 10- straight or gay
- Share the information with others 12-14
- Support and information they receive are critical to long term health

Why a need for more information?

- Because youth are coming out, parents, teachers, supporters
 - Need accurate information on SO/GI
 - Need to recognize their reactions count
 - Cannot dismiss or ridicule
- Homosexuality and bisexuality are part of normal variability in sexual orientation
- Adolescents will be more open about sexual orientation/gender identity if not ridiculed

The old story to monitor against

- Kids act or look different
- Are bullied verbally or physically
- Experience anxiety, depression
- Use maladaptive coping
 - Cigarettes
 - Eating changes
 - Alcohol
 - Substance use
 - Early sexual experimentation

Changing the narrative

- What do you do or say when you see the old story trying to take over a new kid?
- What can you do or say instead?

Family Acceptance Project

- Director Caitlin Ryan, PhD
- Author: Supportive families, healthy children: helping families with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender children, San Francisco, CA. Marian Wright Edelman Institute
- “Talking about family of origin vs. family of choice is not a good solution”

Family Acceptance Program

- San Francisco based program
- Fights against concept of “family of choice” replacing family of origin
- Point out to parents that rejected kids are 4-8X more likely to suicide
- Has identified two lists
 - Supportive behaviors
 - Rejecting behaviors
- 85% of families served are of color or strongly religiously identified

Myths about being gay

- Parents or caregivers can “make someone straight or gay” by what they say or do
- “People decide to be gay”
- “Being attracted to same sex is just a phase which will pass”
- “Toughening” up effeminate boys makes them straight
- Blocking access to gay friends or support will help kids become straight

Unconscious bias

- UB is present in all of us
- UB exists around race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, even age
- UB is present even in stigmatized people against themselves
- Leads people to treat LGBT people as “less than” or to rejecting them
- Google harvard & implicit bias for samples

Unconscious bias

- Can put words into our mouths
- Can invite us to laugh when nothing is funny
- Invites people to look away when bullying takes place
- Invites us to blame the victim and not the bully
- Invites us to ignore our obligation to fight bullying
- May lead to destructive acts by closeted people

Family Acceptance Project Research

- Identified 100 critical parent-child behaviors
- About half supportive
- About half rejecting
- When parents try to help their children fit in with straight peers, they use rejecting behaviors
- Which in turn lead kids to feel unloved

High rejecting families

- 8X rate of suicide attempts among children
- 6X rate of depression
- 3X use of illegal drugs
- 3X rate of getting an STI (sexually transmitted infection)
- Leads to closeted kids, not straight kids
- Closeted people can abuse LGBT youth
- Spitzer comments on 2002 article

What rejecting behaviors have you heard about when teens come out?
What should families avoid?

Rejecting behaviors

- Hitting, slapping, physically hurting
- Verbal harassment
- Keeping LGBT kid from family events
- Blocking access to LGBT friends
- Blaming child for being discriminated against
- Telling him to be more masculine (her-feminine)
- Shaming
- Telling them to hide their identity
 - Family Acceptance Project

What supportive behaviors might families engage in?
When teens come out?

Supporting behaviors

- Talk about their LGBT identity
- Express affection when they come out
- Support child even when you feel uncomfortable
- Advocate for child when mistreated
- Bring child to LGBT support functions
- Connect child with adult role model
- Find supportive congregation
- Welcome LGBT friends
- Believe they can have a happy life
- Support child's gender expression
 - Family Acceptance Project

The Power of Stories

- We tell stories of and to ourselves
- Our families
- Our cultures
- To share values
- To inspire
- To warn
- To provide models for life

Cultures Tell Stories too: The Power of Stories

- Twin spirited Native Americans
 - LGBT people were seen as closer to god who had neither male nor female gender
 - Two spirited people were parts of many tribes
- Fa'fa'ine of Samoa
 - Gay men provided care for sibling's children
- Nanshoku of Japan
 - Mentoring of young male trainees by samurai
 - Sometimes involved sexual relationship

US Cultural Stories around LGBT

- Sin
 - **For The Bible Tells Me So-** documentary
- Criminal behavior
 - Lawrence v. Texas removed sodomy as a crime in 2003
- Mental illness
 - DSM I and 1973
 - Pathology? Normal variability?
 - Hangover from years of pathologizing?

Family Stories: Evolution

- My grandmother and my uncle
 - Became a star of the family
 - Successful but alcohol destroyed his liver
- My grandmother warning my mother
 - Powerful problem: people need to feel they have control over events
- Grand-nephew coming out
- Younger family member telling me of her son

Family Stories II

- Is there a family story re LGBT issues you can share?
- How might that story be told differently if it could be edited?
- Small groups
- Talk among group

Stories in the Classroom- I

- “That’s so gay!”
- “Faggot!”
- Small groups:
 - Identify an instance in which the offensive language stopped
 - OR
 - Identify an intervention which might stop it and consider how it might be applied successfully
 - Share

Stories in the Classroom

- How do cultural stories about LGBT issues intrude into the classroom?
 - Each write one or two examples
 - In small groups, select one example for editing
 - As a group, identify three questions you might ask the students to discuss
 - What are likely obstacles to be dealt with?

Community Resources

- PFLAG(PFLA) Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays
- GLSEN (Gay and Lesbian Support Education Network)
- GSA (Gay Straight Alliance)
- Lambda Center Friday night youth groups
- Golden Rule Services-
 - Sacramento based African American gay support

What Other Support Exists Locally?

- What do you plan to do?
- What is the first step?
- Who can you recruit as resources?
- How do you prevent burnout?