



Diversity in People: Gays--The Invisible Minority

One of the most controversial dimensions of diversity is sexual orientation. In fact, for some, the terms sexual orientation and diversity are synonymous. The two terms, of course, are not one in the same. Diversity encompasses a much broader array of differences and similarities including race, ethnicity, age, physical and mental ability, religion, language, geographical location, parental and marital status, and the list could go on. Sexual orientation is, however, one important dimension of diversity.

Gay men, lesbian women, and bisexuals can all be referred to as gay persons. Gays are “the invisible minority” because they cannot be identified simply by appearance. Although people may make assumptions about who is gay and who is straight based on stereotypes about appearance and behaviors, these are often incorrect (Esty, Griffin & Hirsch, 1995). Unless one identifies oneself as gay, that characteristic is unknown.

If lesbians were purple, none would be admitted in respected places. But, if all lesbians suddenly turned purple today, society would be surprised at the number of purple people in high places.--Sidney Abbott & Barbara Love, Sappho Was A Right-On Woman

The percentage of Americans who are gay varies according to the source and there is no accurate way to know for sure. Generally, it is believed that between two and ten percent of Americans are gay. More recent figures tend to lean closer to the lower end of that range (Carr-Ruffino, 1998).

Many people who are otherwise open to similarities and differences in people, are not open to acceptance of gay sexual behavior. Many of those who disapprove of gay behavior do so based on strong religious beliefs. Gay sex may be considered immoral and a sin against religion. It is also believed by some to be a matter of choice.

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Whether or not being gay is a matter of choice is an extremely controversial topic. There are at least two schools of thought that are related to this topic: the nurture theory and the nature theory. Nurture theory proposes that one becomes gay due to environmental factors that influence a person's perceptions and preferences. Such factors might include having a passive father and an emotionally domineering mother, or being exposed to gay persons and gay roles. Bisexuals are considered clear proof that people can choose to engage in sexual behavior with either males or females. Those who subscribe to the nurture theory believe that these environmental factors can be overcome and therefore, people can choose to be gay or to be straight.

Nature theory proposes a genetic or hormonal basis for homosexuality and suggests that people are destined to be gay or straight before they are born. Some researchers believe that some male fetuses may be insensitive to the masculinizing hormone androgen while in the womb, a condition called androgen-insensitivity syndrome. The result is a person who is born psychologically female but with working male sexual organs. Other researchers use studies with identical twins to support a genetic basis for sexual orientation. Bailey (cited in Carr-Ruffino, 1998) reports a study of lesbian women which found that of those who were identical twins, a much higher percentage of their twin sisters were also lesbians, than was the case for fraternal twins or adoptive twins. Similar results have been reported for studies of gay male twins.

Public opinion on the subject has changed over the last 20 years or so. Between 1977 and 1999 Gallop polls have surveyed random samples of Americans over 18 on this subject. The percentage of people endorsing "the nature theory" has increased from 13% in 1977 to 34% in 1999. At the same time, the percentage of people endorsing "the nurture theory" has declined somewhat from 56% in 1977 to 44% in 1999 (Veniegas & Conley, 2000).

While the controversy over nature or nurture continues, so does discrimination against gay persons. Discrimination is often based on myths and stereotypes. Carr-Ruffino (1998) suggest the following myths about gays:

- Gay men tend to cluster in a few occupations such as hair-dresser, designer, and artist. The fact is that gay men and lesbians are found in a wide range of different occupations, as diverse as the general population.
- People who are friends of gays are also gays. Unfortunately this myth can result in straight people avoiding the company of gays.
- Gay persons do not have normal, lasting relationships. Studies show that gays have the same range of relationships as straight people, ranging from promiscuous behavior to long term, enduring relationships.
- Gay men act feminine and lesbians act masculine. It is dangerous to make this assumption. It can lead to inaccurate beliefs about who is gay and who is straight. Additionally, many gay couples do not assume traditional gender-linked roles in the relationship. Many assume a friendship model based on companionship, sharing, and equality.
- Gay persons tend to be child molesters. Scientific studies have disproved this myth.

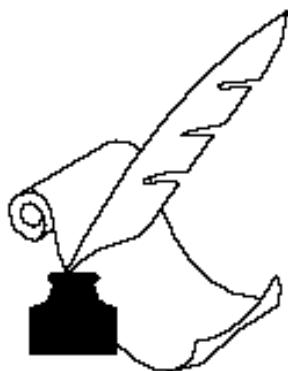
Unfortunately, anti-gay prejudice and hatred leads to inhuman treatment of gays that ranges from verbal harassment to physical assault and even murder. Demeaning and disrespectful language is a common problem for gays. Furthermore, jokes about gays may be considered acceptable even in groups that would never tolerate jokes about other dimensions of diversity. *(continued on page 3)*



Young people are often both the perpetrators and the victims of prejudice and hate crimes related to sexual orientation. In a national survey of 15-24 year old lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth, 80% had been victims of verbal insults; 44% had received threats of attack; 30% had been chased or followed; 17% were victims of physical attack; and 10% had been assaulted with a weapon (Hershberger & D'Augelli, 1995). Gay youth experience other forms of violence to a greater extent than straight youth. They are 2-3 times more likely to attempt suicide, making it the leading cause of death in gay youth. It is estimated that 30% of adolescent suicides are committed by gay youth. Additionally, gay youth account for 30-35% of the homeless youth in the U.S., many being forced out of their parents' homes (Nelson, 1997).

Regardless of age, legal protection against discrimination is limited. Although Pennsylvania, for example, has a Hate Crimes Law, sexual orientation is not covered. The June 1982 Ethnic Intimidation and Institutional Vandalism Act addresses crime motivated by hatred toward race, color, religion, or national origin.

Additionally, there is no federal legislation protecting gays from discrimination in the workplace. Only four states have passed gay rights laws specifically forbidding job discrimination in all organizations that operate within the state, both private business and government. These include: Wisconsin, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Hawaii. At least nine states have issued executive orders prohibiting discrimination against gay persons employed by the state government. A higher number of cities have included sexual orientation in their protected categories of city and county employees.



Aside from employment discrimination, gays do not have many rights that are taken for granted by straight persons. Some of these include: the right to take off time from work to attend to the illness or funeral of a partner, the right to be by the bedside of a partner in a hospital which allows only family members, the right to live wherever one chooses and can afford, and the right to attend the house of worship of one's choice.

Regardless as to one's beliefs about the moral appropriateness of gay behavior, it is important to remember that gay people are first of all people. Sexuality is only one dimension of a gay person's being. Gays have the same variety of interests, abilities, and traits as individuals in the population at large.

References:

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Diversity Around the State: Change Agents States For Diversity

The Change Agent States for Diversity (CASD) project, initiated by Cooperative Extension, is a catalytic step in beginning the transformation of the Land Grant system to more effectively serve the diversity of communities across the nation. It is a consortium of eight states dedicated to supporting greater cultural diversity in the Land Grant system, by bringing the needed technical skills and training to each of the member states. Member states include: Arizona, Colorado, Georgia, Missouri, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, and Pennsylvania. Through this collaborative approach, the consortium will develop successful models and strategies that can be applied throughout the system.



In October 1999, the consortium began to develop and implement a plan of action to build the capacity of these institutions to more effectively serve diverse populations. Each state has a Catalyst Team to spearhead consortium efforts at the state level. The 20 members of the Pennsylvania Catalyst Team represent diverse levels, positions, interests, and demographic backgrounds within the organization. College of Agricultural Sciences and Cooperative Extension administrators, faculty, and staff at the university and county levels are represented.

At the first meeting, the team discussed the meaning of diversity and the need to rebuild the “Extension House” in Pennsylvania to better accommodate a more diverse workforce and program audience. All members received a copy of *Build-*

ing a House for Diversity by R. Roosevelt Thomas, Jr. Members began the process of brainstorming goals for the team.

At the second meeting, the team began the process of prioritizing goals appropriate to the work of this team over the three-year period of the Project. Currently, team members are meeting in “work teams” to develop strategies and timelines which will be developed into a “3-Year Plan of Work.”

Diversity Calendar

November, 2000 - American Indian Heritage Month

- 1st *All Saints Day* - Christian
Dia de los Muertos (Day of the Dead)
Mexico and Latin America
Samhain – first day of Celtic new year
- 2nd *All Soul’s Day* – Catholic Christians
- 5th *National Diversity Week begins* – U.S.
- 11th *Veterans Day* – U.S.
Remembrance Day – Canada
Guru Nanak’s Birthday – founder of Sikh religion
- 23rd *Thanksgiving Day* – U.S.
Labor Thanksgiving Day – Japan
- 25th *Day of the Covenant begins* – Baha’i
- 26th *Ramadan begins* – Islam
- 30th *St Andrew’s Day* – patron saint of Scotland

December, 2000 - Universal Human Rights Month

- 1st *World AIDS Day* – U.N.
Rosa Parks Day – U.S.
- 3rd *Advent begins* – Christian
International Day of Disabled Persons – U.N.
- 5th *St. Nicholas Day* – International
- 10th *Human Rights Day* – U.N.
- 12th *Guadalupe Day* – Mexico
- 13th *Santa Lucia Day* – Sweden
- 15th *Bill of Rights Day* – U.S.
Navidades – Puerto Rico
- 21st *Hanukkah begins at sundown* – Jewish
- 22nd *Lailat Ul-Qadr* – Muslim holiday
Solstice – 1st day of winter in northern hemisphere and 1st day of summer in Southern hemisphere
- 24th *Wigilia* – Poland
- 25th *Christmas* – Christian
- 26th *Kwanzaa begins* – African American
Boxing Day – Canada and U.K.

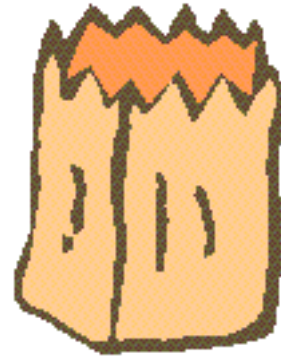
Diversity Activity: My Life In a Bag

This 45 minute diversity exercise uses cultural artifacts to help participants clarify their cultural identities and build pride. The results can form the basis of an ethnic awareness portfolio using the collection, selection and reflection model.

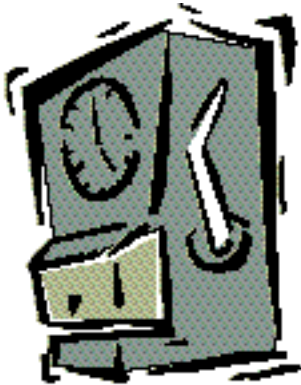
Procedures:

Ask participants to gather the following in preparation for the meeting:

Bring five (5) items in a small paper bag that represent important aspects about you as a person. One item should be a certificate or award and another should illustrate your cultural roots or ethnic identity. Describe on a piece of paper no larger than 3"x5" any of the five (5) items too large to put in the bag.



Plan 40-45 Minutes to conduct the exercise.



1. Divide participants into teams of two members.
2. Distribute one page of lined writing paper to each participant.
3. Have each participant print his/her full name on the paper and exchange it with his/her partner.
4. Tell the participants to exchange their bags and they have five minutes to examine the contents.
5. Ask each participant to write on the lined paper a description of the other participant based on the bag's contents. (10-12 minutes)
6. The participants exchange and read each other's descriptions. (5 minutes)
7. The participants take alternating turns to explain how/why each object represents his/her identity. (10-12 minutes).
8. Conduct a class discussion about the exercise, focusing on how initial perceptions contribute to cultural misunderstanding. (10-15 minutes)

Source: Caruso, J. (1999). My Life In A Bag. Electronic Magazine of Multicultural Education [online], 1 (4), 2 paragraphs. Available: <http://www.eastern.edu/publications/emme/1999fall/caruso.html>

Diversity In The Workplace: Valuing Diversity -- Assess Yourself

The ability to relate to all types of people in the workplace is a leadership skill that is becoming more important all the time. To what extent do you value diversity in your work environment? Take a few minutes to assess yourself. Rate yourself openly and honestly on a scale of 1 to 5 for each item.

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1. I understand the Extension System's diversity goals.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I regularly assess my strengths and weaknesses in the area of diversity, and I consciously try to improve.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I'm always asking questions. I'm curious about new things and people.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I ask for clarifications when I don't understand what someone is saying.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I'm committed to respecting all co-workers, customers and vendors.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I listen carefully.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I avoid jargon or slang when I'm around those who don't understand my cultural jargon or slang.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I consider the effect of cultural differences on messages being transmitted.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I work willingly and cooperatively with people different from me.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I realize how bonding with my own group may exclude, or be perceived as excluding others.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I check my assumptions about others who are culturally or racially different than I.	1	2	3	4	5
12. I can communicate with and influence people who are different from me in positive ways.	1	2	3	4	5
13. I'm interested in the ideas of people who don't think as I do, and I respect their opinions even when I disagree.	1	2	3	4	5
14. I am aware of my prejudices and consciously try to control my assumptions about people.	1	2	3	4	5

Valuing Diversity Self Assessment (Continued)

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
15. I recognize I am a product of my own upbringing, and my way is not the only way.	1	2	3	4	5
16. I work to make sure that people who are different from me are heard and are respected.	1	2	3	4	5
17. I try to help others understand my differences.	1	2	3	4	5
18. I help others succeed by sharing unwritten rules and showing them how to function better.	1	2	3	4	5
19. I apologize when I've offended someone.	1	2	3	4	5
20. I resist the temptation to make another group the scapegoat when something goes wrong.	1	2	3	4	5
21. I refrain from repeating rumors that reinforce stereotypes.	1	2	3	4	5
22. I believe and convey that non-conventional employees are as skilled and competent as others are.	1	2	3	4	5
23. Some of my friends or associates are different from me in age, gender, race, physical and mental abilities, economic status, and education.	1	2	3	4	5
24. I turn over responsibility to people who are different from me as often as I do to people who are like me.	1	2	3	4	5
25. I disregard physical characteristics when interacting with others and when making decisions about competence or ability.	1	2	3	4	5
26. I refrain from repeating rumors that reinforce prejudice bias.	1	2	3	4	5

Total by Column _____

Total Score _____

Score

0 - 36

37 - 64

65 - 92

93 - 120

121 - 130

You Are

Incognizant

Conventionalist

Uninvolved

Catalyst

Maverick

Developed by David Tang, 4-H Agent Dauphin County, for the Diversity Training: Understanding and Communicating with Diverse Audiences, September 24, 1999. Adapted from: Partner for Better Communities Project: Valuing Diversity Self Assessment by Pamela V. Morris, Ph.D. Purdue University Cooperative Extension.

Diversity Resource: Spanish-English Agricultural Dictionary



THOMSON'S SPANISH-ENGLISH/
ENGLISH-SPANISH ILLUSTRATED
AGRICULTURAL DICTIONARY

By Dr. Robert P. Rice, Jr.

This is a hands-on book of English to Spanish and Spanish to English devoted strictly to agricultural terms. Agricultural, botanical, horticultural, livestock, equipment, tools, weeds, diseases, insects, etc. are all listed, both in English and Spanish. Also, a portion is illustrated with English and Spanish terminology. It is designed to be used on a day-to-day basis. This paperback is \$27.95 per unit or \$22.95 for orders of 10 or more. The book is available from Thomson Publications, P.O. Box 9335, Fresno, CA. For more information call (209) 435-2163, or visit their website at www.agbook.com.

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