

COMING OUT:
UNDERSTANDING THE MULTI-LAYER
COMPLEXITIES OF IDENTITY,
ETHNICITY, RELIGION, ECONOMICS
AND ORIENTATION

Jhon H. Velasco

Director, Creating the Possibilities

Associate Director, Equity and Diversity Montclair
State University

BRIEF HISTORY

- Silence
- Pink and Black Triangles
- Faggot
- Stonewall
- Harvey Milk
- HIV/AIDS
- Don't Ask Don't Tell
- Mathew Shepard
- Marriage Equality
- Tyler Clementi



GLOSSARY OF TERMS

1. Closet
2. Coming Out
3. Bisexual
4. Gay
5. Gender Role
6. Heterosexism
7. Lesbian
8. Queer
9. Transgender
10. Sexual Orientation



COMING OUT ...

- COMING OUT is a life – long process of exploring one’s sexual orientation and Gay / Lesbian identity and sharing it with family, friends, co-workers and the world.
- COMING OUT is one of the most significant developmental processes in the lives of Gay and Lesbian people.
- Coming Out is short for the phrase “coming out of the closet.”
- Coming Out means recognizing, accepting, expressing and sharing ones’ sexual orientation with oneself and others.



- What is coming out?
- Stages of coming out ...



- Why might GLBTQ folks be “afraid” to come out?
- Why would GLBTQ folks want to come out?
- How would someone feel after someone comes out to them?



HOW WOULD SOMEONE FEEL ABOUT COMING OUT TO SOMEONE?

- Scared
- Vulnerable
- Relieved
- Wondering how the person will react
- Proud



WHAT MIGHT GLBTQ FOLKS BE “AFRAID” OF?

- Reject – loss of relationships
- Gossip
- Harassment/abuse
- Being thrown out of family
- Being thrown out of the house
- Having their lover arrested
- Loss of financial support
- Losing their job
- Physical violence



WHY MIGHT GLBTQ FOLKS WANT TO COME OUT TO FRIENDS/FAMILY?

- End the “hiding game”
- Feel closer to those people
- Be able to be “whole” around them
- Stop wasting energy by hiding all the time
- Feel like they have integrity
- To make a statement that “gay is ok”



HOW WOULD SOMEONE FEEL AFTER SOMEONE COMES OUT TO THEM ...

- Scared
- Shocked
- Disbelieving
- Uncomfortable
- Not sure what to say
- Not sure what to do next
- Wondering why the person “came out”
- Supportive
- Flattered



COMING OUT ...

- When an individual comes out, family, friends, coworkers, etc may take a variety of stances when it comes to acceptance.
- It is important to recognize that the reaction of those around an individual impacts his/her physical, emotional, and mental health.
- As an ally, make sure to meet an individual where they are at in the coming out process and recognize the challenges and barriers they may be facing.
- If an individual is not experiencing “full acceptance,” coming out may be scary, harmful, and even unsafe.



○ **Pre-coming out**

The individual is not conscious of same-sex feelings because of strong-defenses built up to defend against these feelings. Person does feel somewhat different, but does not understand the reason.

○ **Coming out**

Acknowledgement of feelings. Limited disclosure for external validation. May make contact with other gays and lesbians, but avoids telling family and friends.

○ **Exploration**

More interactions with gays and lesbians, adds “experimentation” with new sexual identity. Improved interpersonal skills to make up for “developmental lag” if coming out occurs after adolescence.




- **First Relationship**

Desire for more stable and committed relationship and less experimentation. Combines emotional and physical attraction.

- **Integration**

Public and private identities merge into one unified self-concept. Relationships are more mature and the person is better able to meet everyday problems and pressures.



CASS' MODEL OF COMING OUT

Stage 1 - Identity Confusion

- "Who am I?"
- Feeling one is different from peers
- Sense of personal alienation
- Beginning consciousness of same-sex feelings or behavior
- No sharing of inner turmoil



STAGE 2 - IDENTITY COMPARISON

- Rationalization or bargaining stage: maybe this is just temporary, just a phase
- Sense of not belonging anywhere
- "I am the only one in the world"



STAGE 3 - IDENTITY TOLERANCE

- "I probably am gay/lesbian"
- Beginning contact with other gay/lesbian people
- Barely tolerates own gay/lesbian identity
- Feelings of not belonging with heterosexuals



STAGE 4 - IDENTITY ACCEPTANCE

- Continued and increased contact with other gay/lesbian people
- Forming friendships
- Beginning to accept a more positive self-image
- Beginning to feel a sense of belonging



STAGE 5 - IDENTITY PRIDE

- “These are my people”
- Increasing awareness of gap between gay/lesbian and non-gay worlds
- Anger towards non-gay people; rejection of their values and institutions
- Discloses gay/lesbian identity to more people
- Desires to immerse self in gay/lesbian subculture



STAGE 6 - IDENTITY SYNTHESIS

- Anger toward non-gay world mellows
- Realization that some non-gay people are friends, allies, supporters
- Some continuing anger at injustice of society's attitudes/treatment
- Gay/lesbian identity becomes integrated into personality



REV. JAMES NELSON BREAKS UP THESE STANCES INTO FOUR DIFFERENT CATEGORIES.

1. Rejecting Punitive: i.e. individual is kicked out of house, fired from job, physically assaulted.
2. Rejecting Non-Punitive: i.e. refusing to be friends with someone, "this is a phase", name-calling.
3. Qualified Acceptance: i.e. "I don't care, just don't hit on me," Don't ask don't tell, "Just don't bring it in my house."
4. Full Acceptance: i.e. "I love you no matter what," Some examples may include, joining PFLAG, inviting partner to family functions, etc.



THE TRANSGENDER EXPERIENCE

- The old understanding of the word transgender meant a person whose gender identity differs from what is culturally associated with their biological sex at birth.
- However, as information has evolved, it is now an umbrella term that includes a wide range of identities and includes pre-operative, post-operative, and non-operative transsexual people.
- In its general sense, it refers to anyone whose behavior or identity falls outside of stereotypical expectations for their gender.



TRANSGENDER or TRANS UMBRELLA



**TRANSSEXUAL
WOMEN**

(Male to Female)

**TRANSSEXUAL
MEN**

(Female to Male)

**INTERSEX
PEOPLE**

**ANDROGYNE
& POLYGENDER
PEOPLE**

**CROSS-DRESSING
& TRANSVESTITE
PEOPLE**

PRONOUN USE

When it comes to pronoun use, don't be afraid to ask the individual which pronouns they prefer.

If you let the person know that you are only trying to be respectful, your question will usually be appreciated.

For instance, you can ask:

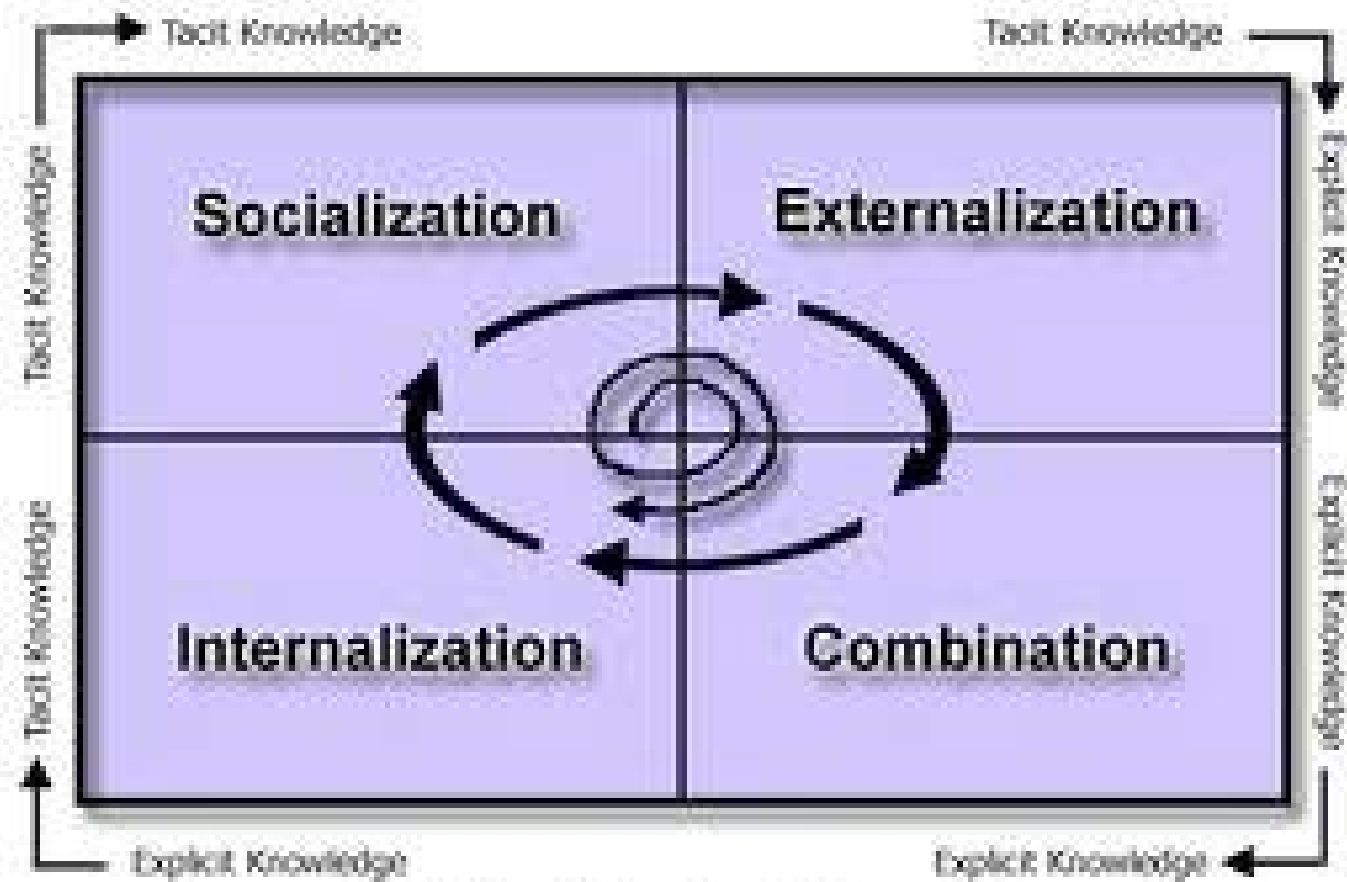
- "How would you like to be addressed?"
- "What name would you like to be called?"
- "Which pronouns do you prefer?"

Some younger transgender persons prefer gender neutral pronouns (i.e. zee/hir) in lieu of gender specific pronouns (i.e. his/her).



Theories & Models





Spiral of Knowledge Creation
by Nonaka & Takeuchi (1995)



Conscious acceptance unconscious acceptance-
Do nothing promote status quo,
Inaction as action,
Pass to new generation
Become part of the problem



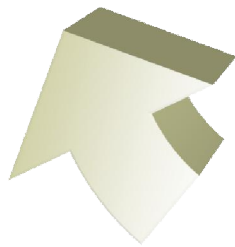
Born into the world-
no choice who we are
no information
no misinformation
no biases or stereotypes



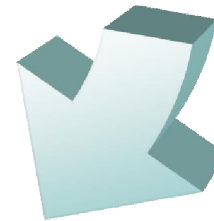
Results in-
Guilt, fear,
Confusion
Self hatred
Stress, Hate ,Rage,
hurt, dehumanization,
defensiveness, lack of reality, ignorance



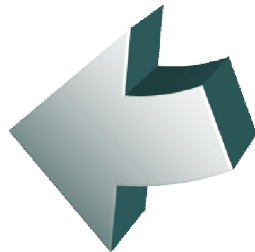
Specialized by-
Peers
Parents
Teachers
People we trust



Reinforced by messages from-
Media
Schools
Religious institutions
Government laws
Privileges, punishments
Discrimination
Empowerment



Our norms values rules and roles are
shaped by-
Stereotypes
Myths
Misinformation



RESEARCH

Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment:
Intersections of Identity: Navigating the Complexities
Angela Ferguson, Assistant Professor , Howard University

Journal of Counseling and Development: The Complexities of
Diversity: Exploring Multiple Oppressions. Amy L.
Reynold, Raechele L. Pope

Journal of Interpersonal Violence
Anti-Gay Violence and Victimization in the United States.
Kevin T. Berrill

Journal of Homosexuality
Beyond "homophobia": A Social Psychological Perspective on
Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men
Gregory M. Herek



FOR MORE INFORMATION ...

- Jhon H. Velasco

Velascoj@mail.montclair.edu

