

FINDING PRIDE: EMPOWERING LGBTQ+ YOUTH THROUGH ONLINE STORIES

Finding Pride:

Empowering LGBTQ+ Youth through Online Stories

Discussion and Activity Guide

www.itgetsbetter.org/FindingPride

It Gets Better Project

www.itgetsbetter.org

Journeys in Film

www.journeysinfilm.org



Journeys in Film™
EDUCATING FOR GLOBAL UNDERSTANDING
In Partnership with USC Rossier School of Education

**IT GETS
BETTER
PROJECT**

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A Letter from *It Gets Better* and *Journeys in Film*



Brian Wenke and Joanne Strahl Ashe



Dear Reader,

Renowned novelist Zora Neale Hurston once wrote: “There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.” Our two organizations know this to be true. For nearly 30 years between us, the *It Gets Better Project* and *Journeys in Film* have worked tirelessly to get powerful stories into the hands and onto the screens of young people around the world. It has been a joyous experience, but there are still countless stories to tell.

We know stories are the lifeblood of culture. They are the means through which we remember those who came before us, and through which we define who we are today. They also help us set goals for a richer tomorrow. When told through the powerful medium of film, stories have the capacity to push us to imagine and realize our boldest dreams.

This guide is one of those dreams. When the first *It Gets Better* video was uploaded to YouTube in 2010, its creators hoped their story would inspire a few others to share their

own. To their surprise, more than 60,000 individuals and groups heeded their call. Today, this video campaign represents one of the largest collections of firsthand stories from the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) community.

When viewed together, these personal videos tell a beautiful story, one of perseverance and triumph over adversity. This is reflected in the unprecedented progress of the global LGBTQ movement over the past decade. Marriage equality now exists in over 20 countries, an increasing number of nations around the world recognize and secure rights and protections for transgender people, and positive representations of LGBTQ people in the media exist on an unprecedented scale..

Tragically, on June 12, 2016, forty-nine queer people of color and community allies were shot and killed at Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida. LGBTQ protections around the world continue to be threatened. This guide is one of the ways we aim to counter intolerance.. By sharing the stories of members and allies of the LGBTQ community, we want to inspire empathy and a deeper understanding of the human experiences for all people.

We hope using this guide is as meaningful for you as writing it has been for us. Thank you for joining us in this work.

Brian Wenke
Executive Director
It Gets Better Project

Joanne Strahl Ashe
Executive Director
Journeys in Film

About *It Gets Better*

The ***It Gets Better*** video campaign was launched on YouTube in September 2010. It began with one video recorded in response to a number of LGBTQ youth in crisis, and in particular, several suicides among LGBTQ youth that were widely reported in the media. Its creators — syndicated columnist Dan Savage and his husband Terry Miller — believed that if they had been able to speak with these young people beforehand, and share with them their own experiences finding happiness, success, and love after years of struggle, it might have made a difference.

Today, there are over 60,000 ***It Gets Better*** videos online, each one a testament to the love and hope that countless LGBTQ adults and their allies share for LGBTQ youth. Collectively, these videos have been viewed tens of millions of times worldwide, making ***It Gets Better*** one of the most successful social media campaigns for social change of all time.

Shortly after the first videos went viral, the ***It Gets Better Project*** was launched. What was once a social media campaign is now a thriving 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Its headquarters are in Los Angeles, California, but with ***It Gets Better*** affiliates operating in 16 countries on 4 different continents, the organization boasts a truly global operation.

Together, the ***It Gets Better Project*** and its affiliates communicate to LGBTQ youth around the world that it gets better, and work to create and inspire the changes needed to make it better for them. By leveraging their vast collection of user-generated content — as well as new and original content, like online stories, videos, films, and educational guides — they deliver inspiring messages to youth worldwide, wherever they may be. It is a tour de force in storytelling and community building, both on- and offline.

Here are a few examples of the ***It Gets Better Project***'s most impactful work:

- *It Gets Better: Coming Out, Overcoming Bullying, and Creating a Life Worth Living* — a New York Times best-selling book that ranked number 20 in the United States less than one week after being published. Since 2011, over 3,000 copies of the book have been distributed to schools and libraries across the U.S. It has also been published in Italian under the title *Le Cose Cambiano*.
- Two evocative web series for YouTube: *It Got Better* from L/Studios by Lexus, a collection of stories from LGBTQ celebrities about their journeys from struggle to triumph; and *Fearless* with MSNBC and ONE Archives, featuring the stories of nine pioneers from the LGBTQ movement in Los Angeles.
- Two Emmy®-nominated MTV Specials featuring the stories of LGBTQ young people across the United States. The *It Gets Better Project* was awarded the 2012 Governors Award at the Emmys® for its work on the series, an honor bestowed on individuals, companies, or organizations that have made a substantial impact and demonstrated the extraordinary use of television.
- Partnerships with heartwarming films, including *Out and Around*, a documentary about a lesbian couple from San Francisco who quit their jobs to travel the world, and *First Girl I Loved*, a scripted film about a young girl's coming-of-age experience that won the Audience Award for «Best of NEXT» at the 2016 Sundance Film Festival.

About *Journeys in Film*

Founded in 2003, *Journeys in Film* operates on the belief that teaching with film has the power to prepare students to live and work more successfully in the 21st century as informed and globally competent citizens. Its core mission is to advance global understanding among youth through the combination of age-appropriate films from around the world, interdisciplinary classroom materials, and teachers' professional-development offerings. This comprehensive curriculum model promotes widespread use of film as a window to the world to help students to mitigate existing attitudes of cultural bias, cultivate empathy, develop a richer understanding of global issues, and prepare for effective participation in an increasingly interdependent world. Our standards-based lesson plans support various learning styles, promote literacy, transport students across the globe, and foster learning that meets core academic objectives.

Selected films act as springboards for lesson plans in subjects ranging from math, science, language arts, and social studies to other topics that have become critical for students, including environmental sustainability, poverty and hunger, global health, diversity, and immigration. Prominent educators on our team consult with filmmakers and cultural specialists in the development of curriculum guides, each one dedicated to an in-depth exploration of the culture and issues depicted in a specific film. The guides merge effectively into teachers' existing lesson plans and mandated curricular requirements, providing teachers with an innovative way to fulfill their school districts' standards-based goals.

Why use this program?

To be prepared to participate in tomorrow's global arena, students need to gain an understanding of the world beyond their own borders. *Journeys in Film* offers innovative and engaging tools to explore other cultures and social issues, beyond the often negative images seen in print, television, and film media.

For today's media-centric youth, film is an appropriate and effective teaching tool. *Journeys in Film* has carefully selected quality films that tell the stories of young people living in locations that may otherwise never be experienced by students. Students travel through these characters and their stories: they drink tea with an Iranian family in *Children of Heaven*, play soccer in a Tibetan monastery in *The Cup*, find themselves in the conflict between urban grandson and rural grandmother in South Korea in *The Way Home*, and watch the ways modernity challenges Maori traditions in New Zealand in *Whale Rider*.

In addition to our ongoing development of teaching guides for culturally sensitive foreign films, *Journeys in Film* brings outstanding documentary films to the classroom. Working in partnership with the Rossier School of Education at the University of Southern California, *Journeys in Film* has identified exceptional narrative and documentary films that teach about a broad range of social issues in real-life settings such as famine-stricken and war-torn Somalia, a maximum-security prison in Alabama, and a World War II concentration camp near Prague. *Journeys in Film* curriculum guides help teachers integrate these films into their classrooms, examining complex issues, encouraging students to be active rather than passive viewers, and maximizing the power of film to enhance critical thinking skills and to meet the Common Core standards.

Journeys in Film is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and is working in partnership with the University of Southern California's Rossier School of Education. Together, they will reach thousands more teachers and millions more students in the United States and internationally. They are working toward establishing an institute for film and global education.

Rossier School of Education's mission is to improve learning in urban education locally, nationally, and globally. USC Rossier leads the way in innovative, collaborative solutions to improve education outcomes. USC Rossier prides itself on innovation in all its programs, preparing teachers, administrators, and educational leaders who are change agents.

Introducing *Finding Pride: Empowering LGBTQ+ Youth through Online Stories*

The monomyth, or the “hero’s journey,” is a common plot template, first described by Professor Joseph Campbell, that can be found in thousands of stories. It begins with a hero, the protagonist of the story, who goes on an adventure. Eventually, the hero is confronted with a crisis, which typically occurs around the climax of the story. Once the crisis has been overcome, the hero returns home changed for the better.

Many *It Gets Better* videos follow the same story arc. They begin with a hero (e.g. celebrities, politicians, decision-makers, or everyday people) confronted by a crisis. For some, it is questioning their gender identity. For others, it is experiencing intense discrimination. For almost everyone, it is deciding whether or not to come out to their family and friends. Whatever the crisis may be, it is usually complex and, at times, seemingly insurmountable. But eventually, our hero emerges, coming out, finding a community that supports and loves them, and, most importantly, learning to embrace their authentic selves.

When LGBTQ youth identify with a mentor or peer they see on screen, particularly those with backgrounds and experiences similar to their own, they may see themselves progressing along the same hero’s journey and can become empowered by the possibility of a brighter future. This experience can be shared with non-LGBTQ young people, as well. Not only can the *It Gets Better* videos motivate and inspire all who view them, they can also support understanding and empathy for those who are different.

Educators play a pivotal role in guiding young people along their own personal hero’s journey. This guide is meant to help educators help their students. It is divided into six intersectional themes that influence how many LGBTQ people understand and express pride in who they are. The themes include coming out, community, gender, race, faith, and family. Although there are many more factors capable of influencing life experiences, the ones highlighted in this guide are frequently found in the *It Gets Better* video collection available at www.itgetsbetter.org.

The lesson plans come with videos, discussion questions, activities, and more, which can be found at www.itgetsbetter.org/FindingPride. They are not comprehensive but could easily be expanded into a semester-long course at your local university. The intent is to open students up to thinking critically and empathetically about each theme. Below are a few ideas on integrating some or all of this guide into an educational setting:

- **Time is scarce.** Working through this guide from beginning to end could require most of a quarter in a typical school year. The lessons provide options/opportunities to review stories through multiple lenses and to choose which components best suit the student audience.
- **This guide extends beyond the classroom.** An “educator” refers to anyone who works to help young people learn and grow. This includes teachers, community leaders, club faculty advisors, parents, and more. The lessons are meant for those who lead groups of young people; the lessons are meant to be shared and adapted.

- **Each lesson plan embodies a different story.** The *It Gets Better* Project works with a vast network of skilled volunteers. For this guide, six certified teachers designed the lesson plans. They were chosen because of their personal connection to the theme (which can be seen in their own *It Gets Better* videos included with the lesson plan introductions), as well their experience creating outstanding curriculum. All are members or allies of the LGBTQ community. Because their experiences vary, so will their vocabulary and perspectives.
- **Approach this guide with a willingness to learn.** Many LGBTQ adults are surprised to learn of the ways in which today's youth are talking about gender, sex, and sexual orientation. Their perspectives and vocabularies are constantly progressing, as can be seen in parts of this guide. For example, the pronoun "they" is frequently used as an epicene (or gender-neutral) singular pronoun in place of expressions like "he or she." This is on purpose, to show respect for diverse gender identities. It may seem unusual, but it's encouraged because of its inclusivity.
- **Allies are welcome.** By no means is this guide intended for LGBTQ audiences only. It's intended for current and future allies of the LGBTQ community, too. Their love and support is greatly needed, as are their personal stories. As such, anyone who comes into contact with this guide is encouraged to make an *It Gets Better* video. For non-LGBTQ people, think: How have I helped make things better for LGBTQ youth? What message of love do I want to share with the LGBTQ community?

Pride and Coming Out

Materials Needed

Computer or laptop, projector, speakers, and Internet connection that allows access to YouTube.com

Notes to the Educator or Discussion Leader

Imagine you carry a 100-pound chain around your neck every day that no one else can see. They say to you, “Come on! Speed up! Cheer up! There is life all around you.” You watch them speed by, on their way to football practice or the school dance, or to ace the calculus exam, and you follow along at half-pace, the only one aware of the chain and how heavy your shoulders feel.

And then one day, someone gives you the opportunity to take the chain off and feel what life is like without that burden. They see you, standing tall and free, and you feel like you can run and leap and take on life in a totally new and different way.

For many LGBTQ individuals, the years before we are able to come out and have others see us as we truly are can feel like years of shouldering a huge burden. The fear involved in sharing what, for many of us, felt like our deepest and darkest secret, was just like that 100-pound invisible chain — suffocating, restraining, and constantly holding us back from a life worth living.

Coming out is a deeply personal event, and not one that ends the first time you share it. In today’s session, our goal is to understand what it means to “come out” from the perspectives of several members of the LGBTQ community, to understand the ways in which you can help to build safe spaces in your school and community to encourage each person, whether they identify as LGBTQ or as another member of a minority community, to feel protected and to feel a sense of belonging, and to equip yourself with the tools to be an ally to anyone who might share their identity with you.

To ground us in a COMMON understanding, we share three data points with you from the Human Rights Campaign's survey, *Growing Up LGBT in America*:

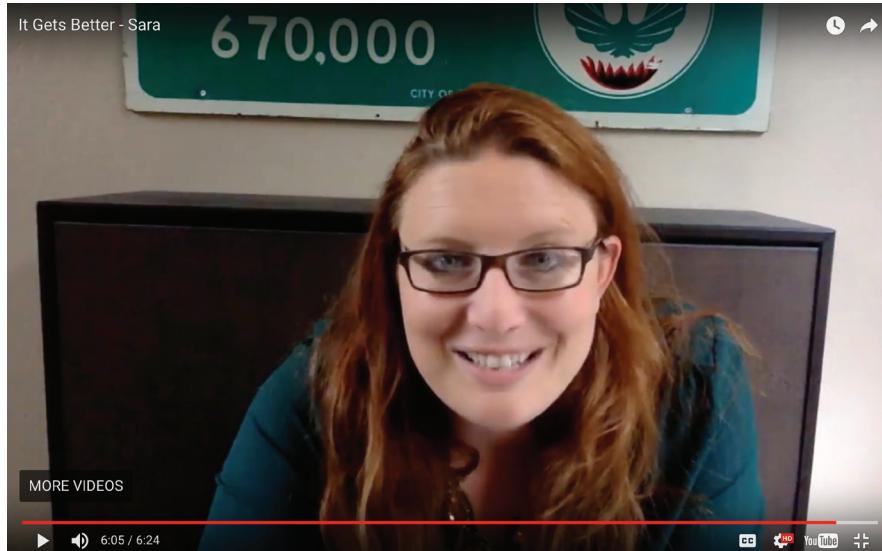
- 1 in 5 LGBTQ youth say that feeling that they cannot come out is the greatest problem facing them today.
- 1 in 4 LGBTQ youth believe they cannot come out to their families because it will directly affect their well-being.
- 1 in 3 LGBTQ youth do not feel they have a single adult they can talk to about their identity.

Friends and allies have the power to change those statistics. There are a wide array of resources on the topic of coming out, and we encourage you to visit the following websites to read more:

- Considering coming out and needing help:
www.hrc.org/explore/topic/coming-out
- Coming out LGBTQ in the workplace:
www.fastcompany.com/3057357/heres-everywhere-in-america-you-can-still-get-fired-for-being-lgbt
- Resources for parents and friends of someone coming out: www.pflag.org/tags/comingout

As we go through this session, we encourage you to consider the ways in which you can support and provide safe spaces for anyone carrying around an invisible 100-pound chain and challenge yourself to ask, "What can I do to make the burden easier to bear?"

A Video Message from a Lesson Writer



Lesson 1, Video #1:

It Gets Better — Sara Taylor

*Managing Director of Academics and
Talent*

Rocky Mountain Prep
Denver, CO

Originally Uploaded: April 24, 2017
Length: 6 minutes, 24 seconds

“I want my daughter to grow up knowing that whether she brings home a boy or a girl or someone who identifies differently from that, that we love her, and that’s part of who she is, and we love her for it, not despite it.”

NOTE:

All of the videos included in this lesson plan can be found at

[www.itgetsbetter.org/FindingPride.](http://www.itgetsbetter.org/FindingPride)

Videos and Questions

This section is the heart of the lesson plan. It is filled with stories of real people, talking about real experiences. Each story was contributed online to the *It Gets Better* video campaign and has been chosen because of its connection to this lesson plan's theme. The videos are all followed by questions that inspire discussion and further inquiry. You can watch them all at once, or you can choose the ones you think are particularly meaningful for your intended audience.



Lesson 1, Video #2:

It Gets Better: Dan and Terry

Co-Founders of the It Gets Better Project

Originally Uploaded: September 21, 2010

Length: 8 minutes, 31 seconds

“Your life can be amazing, but you have to tough this period of it out, and you have to live.”

Questions:

1. Why do you think this video was chosen for this topic?
2. Why do you think Dan and Terry made this video?
3. What were some of the challenges Dan faced when coming out? What were some of the challenges Terry faced when coming out? Why do you think their experiences differed?
4. Have you ever had a “secret” that you struggled with at school? What made it challenging? What helped you?
5. Think of an example of bullying you’ve either experienced or witnessed. What was the impact of that experience? Now that you have reflected on that memory, what, if anything, do you wish you had done differently at the time?



Lesson 1, Video #3:

It Gets Better — Apple Employees

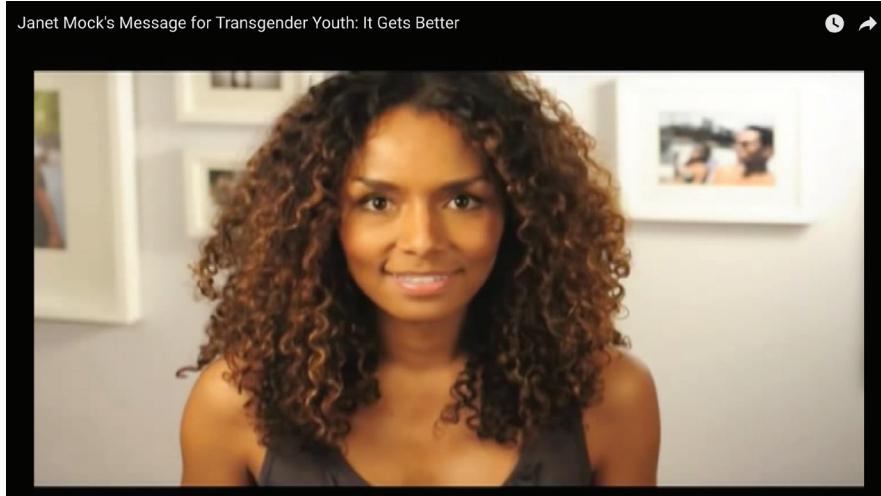
Originally Uploaded: April 13, 2011

Length: 6 minutes and 3 seconds

“No way would I not want to be who I am because my uniqueness is my strength, it’s what differentiates me from other people.”

Questions:

1. Why do you think this video was chosen for this topic?
2. What was similar in the coming out stories? What was different?
3. Time is a critical component in these stories. How does time play a role in the stories of coming out and life “getting better” for the individuals?
4. From these stories, what do you think is the major factor holding people back from coming out? Why?



Lesson 1, Video #4:

Janet Mock's Message for Transgender Youth: It Gets Better

Originally Uploaded: May 12, 2011

Length: 2 minutes 50 seconds

“I know you can live the life of your dreams, as well... I know because I am you.”

Questions:

1. Why do you think this video was chosen for this topic?
2. How do you think Janet's experience in coming out may have differed from Terry and Dan's?
3. What does Janet identify as the most critical lever in supporting her through her coming out experience? Why?
4. How does the intersection of gender and sexuality play out in your personal experiences when meeting new people? How might this affect coming out for LGBTQ individuals?



Lesson 1, Video #5:

**It Gets Better:
WestpacNZ
employees
(Extended version)**

Originally Uploaded:
November 13, 2014
Length: 7 minutes 18 seconds

“Don’t be afraid to shine your light, and nobody can defeat your spirit.”

Questions:

1. Why do you think this video was chosen for this topic?
2. What was similar in the coming out stories? What was different?
3. One of the employees says, “It’s hard to tell the first person.” Another states, “Find one person to have a chat with.” Why is that first person so important? What changes after the first conversation for these people?
4. How do you think coming out affects LGBTQ individuals outside of family and school context?
What are the risks of coming out?

For Further Reflection and Discussion

For Personal Reflection:

1. For LGBTQ people: How would you describe your own coming out process? Is your identity still a secret? Are you partially out? Completely? What have been your struggles so far? What has surprised you about your experience?
2. For allies: Think back to conversations you have had with LGBTQ people when they have come out to you. What about your responses to them makes you proud? What do you wish you had done differently? Has listening to them taught you anything about yourself?
3. Imagine that someone very close to you (a best friend or family member) comes out to you after a long period of secrecy. Try to imagine what emotions you might have as you hear this surprising news from someone you think you know. What do you feel, and what do you do with those emotions?

For Group Discussion:

1. What is one moment or thought from the videos that stood out to you? (This could be a new thought, an important insight, or a statement that made you question something.)
2. Without betraying any confidences, share a coming-out story from someone you know (or your own). What was the most difficult part of that process? What were the rewards? What lessons does that story teach all of us, both LGBTQ people and allies?
3. In general terms, what are some of the risks LGBTQ people take when they come out? What are some of the potential rewards?
4. Many people who come out experience an initial response of hurt or anger from those close to them, even from people who ultimately express their support. Why do you think even allies can respond poorly when they first learn the truth about an LGBTQ person? What fears or assumptions might they be wrestling with?
5. As some of the video participants said, things often get better with time. On the other hand, sometimes LGBTQ people have to make the decision to walk away from negativity. What advice would you give to LGBTQ people who are waiting for their loved ones to accept them?

Activity

Coming Out Stars

This activity was adapted with permission from the “Coming Out Stars” activity by the University of Southern California LGBTQ Resource Center (n.d.)

(See <https://lgbtrc.usc.edu/files/2015/05/Coming-Out-Stars.pdf>)

OBJECTIVE: Students will be able to identify components of privilege and heterosexism to reflect on personal behaviors and beliefs about sexuality and coming out as LGBTQ.

MATERIALS: Large, pre-cut paper stars in four colors, writing utensils, Smartphone or other filming equipment for extension activity for homework

PREPARATION: Each student will need one large paper star. The four colors should be distributed equally.

Description: Each student will have a paper star in one of four different colors. As you read the narrative aloud, students will follow different paths, based on the color of their star. For the purpose of this plan, the colors are red, blue, purple, and green. As you can see, the narrative mixes up the order of the story, so please update the plan accordingly with the colors you use.

Instructions:

1. Randomly pass out the stars, mixing up the colors across the room, ensuring that each person receives only one star. Say, *This star represents you. Each leg of the star will represent your future, your community, your family, and your friends. It is important that you note the color of your star and follow my directions precisely.*
2. Say, *Write your name in the center of the star. Label each leg as follows: in the first leg, write the name of your closest friend; in the second leg, write the name of a family member that you are close to; in the third leg, write the name of a community to which you belong (for example, your religion, sports team, club, etc.); in the fourth leg, write the name of your dream job; and in the fifth leg, write a goal in your life (having a family, attending a specific school, etc.).*
3. After a few minutes, say, *For the purposes of this activity, each of us will identify as LGBTQ. I am going to read a narrative based on the life experiences of real LGBTQ community members. You will follow my directions based on the color of the star that you hold. Please remain silent until the activity is done.*

4. Read the following narrative, pausing between each section as needed.

Say: *You are 17 years old. You've known for about 3 years that you felt differently about your sexuality than some of your friends and people you see in movies. It's starting to weigh on you, especially now that you've met another person whom you really like, and who likes you too. You care deeply about the people around you, and you feel like you are hiding a part of who you are. Today, you've made the decision to take your first step to share this part of your life, and you decide that your best friend is the first person you will tell. You've known this person since you were little. You were there for them when their parents divorced, and you've spent many nights at each other's houses sharing secrets. You feel confident that if anyone will accept you, it will be them because they are the person who knows you better than anyone.*

As I read, please follow the instructions:

- **Red:** Your friend couldn't be kinder. They give you a big hug and thank you for sharing with them. They promise to keep it confidential and swear that they support you and want you to be happy.
- **Purple and Blue:** Your friend is not quite as accepting and is a little annoyed you haven't told them earlier. You decide to let them have some time to process everything, knowing that they will come around. After a few days, things are back to normal, to some extent, though you find that you are not hanging out as much as you used to before you shared your news. Fold back Leg 1 of your star.

- **Green:** Your friend does not accept what you tell them and starts screaming at you. They question whether you've just been trying to get close to them over the years and accuse you of "looking at them." They tell you they never want to speak to you again, and when you try to call later, you find you have been blocked and they have unfriended you on all social media. After a week, it becomes completely clear that the friendship is over, so tear off Leg 1 of your star.

5. Say: *Now that you've told your friend, you decide to tell your close family member. This is a person who knows you very well and cares about you deeply. You might even call this person your favorite family member.*

- **Red:** As you thought, this family member not only accepts what you tell them but they are glad you told them. They ask a few questions about ways that they can support you and give you a huge hug, telling you how much they love you.
- **Purple:** This family member is hesitant and confused, but willing to talk about it with you. Though they need more time to get comfortable with it, they will support you. They pat your back and tell you they love you anyway. Fold back this leg of your star.
- **Blue and Green:** This family member gets extremely angry with you. They tell you to get out of their house and never come back. If you live with this person, you are now homeless with no place to stay. If you do not live with this person, they immediately call the people you live with and convince them to throw you out of the house for your "deviant ways." Tear off this leg of your star.

6. Say: *You now begin to come out to your community.*

- **Red and Purple:** As you share with your community, so many people express how they are glad to have you as a member of the community regardless of how you identify. You can feel the acceptance radiating from others, and a few people who also identify as LGBTQ share their identities with you and their pride and happiness to have you as part of their community.
- **Blue:** While many in your community accept you immediately, there are some who need some time to get used to it. There are a few insensitive remarks and a lot of questions about whether this is just a “phase.” Fold back this leg of your star.
- **Green:** Your community reacts negatively, rejecting and isolating you. They tell you that you are not welcome back into the community and you fear a few of the things that are being said to you, as they feel threatening. Tear off this leg of your star.

7. Say: *Congratulations! You've received an offer at your dream job. Three months into the work, you hear people talking about you and your sexual orientation. Before you decide whether or not you want to come out, the decision is made for you.*

- **Red:** One of your co-workers speaks up and tells them to stop talking about it, that it's private, and that if it is true, they should be committed to supporting you if and when you choose to come out. The rest agree and one of them apologizes for discussing it publicly. Later that day, another co-worker recognizes you for your good work and you get a note on your desk about how happy he is to have you as part of the team.

- **Purple:** During the conversation, one of your co-workers uses an offensive word to describe your perceived sexuality, to which about half the group chuckles and half the group acts offended. To your face, everyone is still nice and the work environment hasn't changed much, but you notice some of your co-workers ending conversations suddenly when you enter a room. Fold down this leg of your star.

- **Blue and Green:** As you are listening, you can hear the group laughing and making some crude jokes about your perceived identity. You ignore it and go back to work as usual. Three days later, you get to work in the morning, and to your surprise, your desk is packed up and your boss is waiting for you. She tells you that the budget is tight and your work hasn't been up to par lately so she's letting you go. Given that you work in a right-to-work state, you don't have any recourse. Tear off this leg of your star.

8. Say: *You have now come out to several people in your life and are continuing to progress towards your aspirations.*

- **Red, Purple, Blue:** Coming out has certainly been a challenging process. Sharing this part of yourself has sometimes really hurt and at other times has been so liberating. You may have lost some relationships, or found out who really respects you for being you, and for some people, it's taken time but you've built new and more meaningful relationships through this experience. You are still working towards those big goals in your life, even though there are setbacks due to the ways in which people respond to your identity.

- **Green:** The coming out process has been extremely difficult. You have faced fear, solitude, prejudice, and the loss of some very important people in your life. There are moments that you don't know if you can bear the obstacles facing you. Tear off this leg of your star.

9. Collect the stars and either tape them to the board or set them on a table. Invite the class to look at the stars while providing two minutes of silent reflection or writing on the question, "How do you feel after this activity? Select another color star to consider. How did their experience differ from yours and how do you think they are feeling right now?" As a group, share your reflections. Some potential discussion questions:

- How did you feel during the activity? Were there any moments that triggered emotions for you?
- Which one of the legs of the star was most precious to you? How did you feel, or how would you feel, if you lost that part of your community after sharing this part of your identity?
- What would you say to someone experiencing the "green star" experience? How can we improve our community to help support LGBTQ community members in their coming out experience and beyond?

Additional Ideas for Engagement:

1. Think of the people who have come out to you. Is there anything you would tell them now? Anything you wish you had done or said differently? Consider reaching out to these people, if only to reaffirm your support for them and to thank them for trusting you.
2. If you are considering coming out, and if you anticipate difficulty in doing that, consider enlisting the support of allies in your network. Are there friends, teachers, or relatives (perhaps someone in this very group) you could trust and lean on as you prepare for some of the more difficult conversations?
3. The main obstacles for LGBTQ people who want to come out are fears related to safety and acceptance. How safe and accepting is your community? Are homophobic jokes or transphobic slurs tolerated or confronted? Are there ways that you can work to transform your community, making it a safe space for people to come out?
4. There are people near you in need of support and friendship, even if you don't know who they are. Consider reaching out to a community like TrevorSpace or PFLAG. (See the Resources section at the end of this guide.) Hear the stories of those who are looking for acceptance, and find your own voice as a proactive ally for those in need.

Conclusion

After hearing these stories, we hope you and your students leave this lesson with one clear message: Coming out, for LGBTQ individuals, is not a one-time, one-month, or even one-year experience. It's an ongoing journey that each individual navigates in their own way, at their own time, every day. Deciding to come out is an opportunity for courage, to experience life as one's authentic self, but it is a deeply personal decision and not one that should ever be made on behalf of someone else. If an individual chooses to come out, we have the opportunity to be an ally, to demonstrate appreciation of the person's courage and to show that we care deeply for people because of who they are as a whole person, living an open and authentic life.

As an extension of this lesson, encourage students to consider making their own *It Gets Better* video, to develop safe-space signage for your school or classroom, or to plan an activity for National Coming Out Day on October 11. Finally, we encourage you to continue to grow as an ally and advocate. A great place to start is this USC Risk Assessment, which helps to identify areas to push ourselves in encouraging dialogue about LGBTQ issues in our classrooms.



Pride and Community

Materials Needed

Computer or laptop, projector, speakers, and Internet connection that allows access to YouTube.com

Notes to the Educator or Discussion Leader

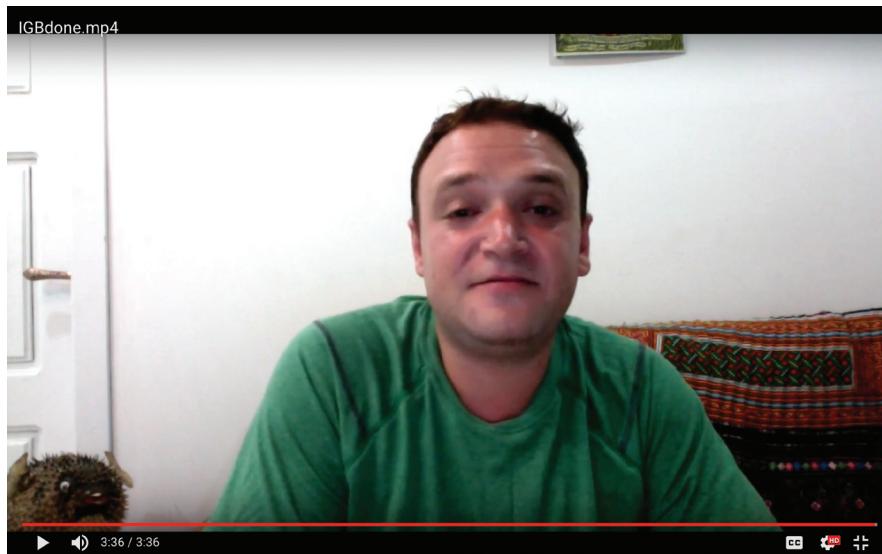
Imagine you are a scientist with a powerful microscope at your disposal. Imagine that you have the opportunity to observe a strange, yet delicate, ecosystem bloom under your eyes, and that, rather than being detached and deeply scientific in your investigation, you find yourself exploring it with wonder, awe, and empathy towards everything you encounter.

In this lesson, we will be social scientists using a metaphorical microscope to strip down our ideas of community to the cellular level to examine the molecular structure of both local and global concepts of community. Look into this microscope at its lowest magnification, and we will begin to notice the larger supporting structures that keep everything moving and running steadily. Another layer in, we might find the agents that comprise community, from the goalie on a football team to a caring big brother. And, if we could zoom in even more, we might see the connections between members of our community, the support networks, the friendships, and the relationships that help pick us up when we fall down.

There is no single story, no finite boundary between what is and isn't a part of the LGBTQ community. Communities broaden us, encouraging us to build resilience. Communities help us transform our fears into strength. And finally, and perhaps most importantly, communities fulfill our human need to share common values, regardless of physical location, to build pride and to serve others. Through art, music, dance, theater, and many other outlets, LGBTQ people have come together within a variety of communities to redefine what it means to be beautiful and what it means to be free.

As we go through this session, we encourage you to maintain an open mind and open heart and ask yourself, “What can I do to make a more welcoming space for all within my school, my organization, or my larger community?”

A Video Message from a Lesson Writer



Lesson 2, Video #1:

It Gets Better — Daniel Rhymer

AP Coordinator, Career and
College Counsellor
CIA FIRST International School
Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Originally Uploaded: May 5, 2017
Length: 3 minutes, 37 seconds

“Let yourself connect to the arts, and you will connect with other people.”

NOTE:

All of the videos included in this lesson plan can be found at
www.itgetsbetter.org/FindingPride.

Videos and Questions

This section is the heart of the lesson plan. It is filled with stories of real people, talking about real experiences. Each story was contributed online to the *It Gets Better* video campaign and has been chosen because of its connection to this lesson plan's theme. The videos are all followed by questions that inspire discussion and further inquiry. You can watch them all at once, or you can choose the ones you think are particularly meaningful for your intended audience.



Lesson 2, Video #2:

President Obama: It Gets Better

Originally Uploaded: October 21, 2010
Length: 3 minute, 7 seconds

“There is a whole world waiting for you, filled with possibilities. There are people out there that love you and care about you just the way you are.”

Questions:

1. What communities does President Obama belong to? What communities is he an ally of? How do you think his relationships with those groups differ, or how are they the same?
2. In the video, President Obama mentions that he has two daughters. How do you think that affects how he feels about bullying in schools?
3. President Obama says that we need to “dispel this myth that bullying is just a normal rite of passage.” What do you think he means by that?
4. President Obama thinks that schools should be places where all kids should feel safe. How do you think you could go about helping your school community to be safer?



Lesson 2, Video #3:

It Gets Better Community

Originally Uploaded: October 8, 2010
Length: 7 minutes 3 seconds

“Before I knew what queer was, I didn’t feel like I had a place to fit in or an identity I could really mesh with.”

Questions:

1. What kind of community do the people in this video share? How was that community created?
2. How would you compare the positive versus negative experiences that some of these individuals went through? What do you think made those experiences memorable enough to mention in the video?
3. What role does art or literature play in the lives of these young people? How did it help them get through tough times?
4. What do all of these people have in common? Do you think most queer communities resemble this one in terms of race or gender?

**Lesson 2, Video #4:****It gets better for
Kumu Hina at
Kamehameha Schools****Originally Uploaded:** March 21, 2016**Length:** 4 minutes 48 seconds

"I found refuge in being Hawaiian... My purpose in this lifetime is to pass on the true meaning of aloha — love, honor, and respect."

Questions:

1. Why do you think this video was chosen for this topic? How does it relate to the concept of community?
2. In your view, how has Kumu Hina's community helped shape her personal values?
3. How have art and song helped Kumu Hina share her message?
4. In what ways has Kumu Hina been embraced by her community, and what does that represent?



Lesson 2, Video #5:

It Gets Better — Vancouver Men's Chorus

Originally Uploaded:
February 28th, 2011
Length: 6 minutes, 26 seconds

“There are girls who grow up brave and bold, there are boys who are quiet and kind.”

Questions:

1. How does this particular video represent community? How important do you think that community is to its members?
2. Is there a difference between an organization and a community? How would you define the similarities or differences?
3. What do the song they are singing and the community they represent have in common?
4. Is this community diverse, or is it fairly homogenous? Why do you think that is?

**Lesson 2, Video #6:****It Gets Better at NC State University // Abridged****Originally Uploaded:** May 3, 2011**Length:** 3 minutes, 58 seconds

“Most people here at NC State see me for a lot more than my sexual orientation, and that really means a lot to me. It’s a really great feeling to know I’m part of a community.”

Questions:

1. The people in this video are most likely members of many different groups both on and off campus. What do you think brings them together as a community?
2. Does your school have a GSA (gay-straight alliance) or other type of club that is accepting of diverse gender identities and sexual orientations? If so, what impact has it made on your campus? If not, how could you help get one started?
3. How important is it to you to go to a college or university that is accepting of LGBTQ people? Why is that? (If you are not LGBTQ, do you think your perspective would be different if you were LGBTQ?)

For Further Reflection and Discussion

For Personal Reflection:

1. What are your impressions of the communities represented in the films? Can you relate to any of the communities in the videos? If so, which ones?
2. In which communities (think as small or as large as you'd like) do you feel most accepted? In which communities do you feel most challenged, in both positive and negative ways?
3. In what ways do the different communities you are a part of overlap? In what ways does your involvement in one inform or influence your involvement in another?
4. How do you prioritize the different communities of which you are a member? Is there a time that you've found the values of two or more of your communities at odds with one another?
5. If one of the communities you spend time in wanted to exclude someone on the basis of their sexuality or gender identity, how would you approach the members of this community?
6. Exclusion from community is something LGBTQ people have all experienced in their lives. Think of a time you were not allowed to participate in something, and share how it made you feel. Have you ever been forced out of a community that was important to you? How did it make you feel?

For Group Discussion:

1. What was your initial vision of community? How did that vision stay the same or change as you watched the videos? What is your vision of community now?
2. These clips showed a variety of communities. What did you notice about the intersections of race or gender with each person's LGBTQ identity? Did you see any similarities or differences in the messages shared?
3. What does it take to build an effective community? What practices can we use in this group right now to ensure this community works well for all its members? How should communities set their norms?
4. Communities develop norms over time, sometimes intentionally and sometimes unintentionally. What can you do to shift a community's norms if they don't align with your own values or identities? How can you work to keep your communities inclusive ones?
5. Sometimes, individuals who share a common identity want a space where they can be together without people who don't share that identity. (Compare a Trans Support Group to a Gay-Straight Alliance.) What are the comparative values of both of these types of communities? What purposes do they serve for their members? How should their goals be different?
6. What specific positive values and experiences can LGBTQ individuals bring to the communities they join? How can these communities make these members feel included? How can they utilize their talents?

Activity

What Does Community Mean to You?

OBJECTIVE: Students will be able to personally define community and identify structures and systems that create community among people.

MATERIALS: Note-taking materials

PREPARATION: Determine a structure to put students in pairs or small groups. Provide written instructions for any participants that might need a visual representation.

DESCRIPTION: Students will create their own “community” and a backstory to the community, including unique greetings, to signify their identity. Students will interact with members of other communities, asking questions to increase understanding, and attempting to become parts of other communities within the classroom.

Instructions:

Divide the class up into pairs or small groups. Explain that each group represents a community and have them discuss and create a definition of community with which all group members feel comfortable. This is meant to be an enjoyable and open activity, so let students explore a variety of ideas and experiences. To that end, communities do not have to be limited to the ones we traditionally think of when talking about social groups (sports teams, religious groups, etc.). Encourage students to create communities of aliens, destructive robots, historical figures, or cartoon characters. Provide the time and questioning to allow students to create a deep history and storyline for their community so that when they speak to others, they will have a lot to say.

Share the following instructions:

1. Collectively decide what kind of community you are. Are you a choir, a sports team, an advocacy group? Are you in the United States or abroad? Feel free to be as creative as you like. What makes you a community? Sketch or describe some of the communal aspects of your group.

2. Describe a bit deeper. What keeps you together? What do you have in common? List all of the characteristics that describe your community. Finally, think of one greeting (a dance, a complex high five, an odd noise) that identifies and binds your fictional community, similar to the way Americans shake hands when we meet new people. What activity best describes your community?
3. Break away from your partner or group and interact with others around the room. **You must start your interaction by exchanging greetings.** Interview people from other communities. Take notes. How does their greeting differ from your greeting? What about their community is similar? What is different? Do you think you could be a member of this community, or would that be impossible? Attempt to learn and become part of as many communities as possible.
4. Let's discuss. Was there a limit to how many communities you could join? Why do you think that was? How many distinct greetings did you have to remember, and was that confusing? Take time and reflect on the process. Is there anything you would do differently when approaching a new community? How did you feel throughout the experience?
5. Using your materials and notes, **write a one-page reflection** connecting this experience to an experience you've had in the past of trying to join a new community, answering one or more of the following questions: What makes it hard to join a new community? Have you ever had a component of your identity (your race, age, gender, sexual orientation, etc.) preclude you from joining a community? What can you do, in the communities in which you are involved, to increase opportunities to welcome and accept new members, regardless of their identity?

Additional Ideas for Engagement:

1. On your own, think about the potential barriers to LGBTQ people joining one of the communities of which you're a member. Have everyone in the group share their barrier and brainstorm potential solutions to each.
2. Visit a local LGBTQ community center to find out more about their work. Volunteer with the center in ways that are meaningful to your group.
3. If your school doesn't have a Genders and Sexualities Alliance (GSA) yet, work to start one. If your school already has one, examine its goals and mission statement to ensure that it is representative and inclusive of all members of your community. Evaluate how well it meets those goals.

Conclusion

There is no single idea to take away from this lesson. Upon completion of these videos, students may be more confused over ideas of identity and community than they were before. The important thing is that the discussion began, and that students move away from this single story of the gay community and try to imagine what it is like growing up LGBTQ in different cultures with different customs.

Ultimately, the message is simple. There are, have been, and always will be LGBTQ people and communities all over the world. We don't all look and act the same and that is what is so amazing! We are part of a community does not limit diversity. From Vancouver to Phnom Penh, Cambodia, we see it really does get better.

For homework, encourage students to consider the ways in which people in communities around the world experience prejudice and acceptance as LGBTQ individuals. Suggest that they visit the World Values Survey website and look at the ways in which at least three countries consider the survey item **“V40 — Would not like to have Homosexuals as neighbors.”** Ask them to consider these questions: What variances, if any, do you see between the countries you selected? What do you think affects a society’s views of homosexuality? What do you think daily life is like for individuals in the countries you selected?

Finally, encourage them to reach out to a local GSA, to experience an event in your community, if available. Allies to all communities are critical if we are to equalize power and increase safe spaces for all members of our community, and each voice is valuable in developing accepting and welcoming communities for all people.

Pride and Race

Materials Needed

Computer or laptop, projector, speakers, and Internet connection that allows access to YouTube.com

Notes to the Educator or Discussion Leader

Pretend that every aspect of your identity is represented as a slice on a pie chart. How many characteristics make up your chart? Which one is the biggest slice? Which one is the most critical to understanding who you are as a person? Is it difficult for you to choose?

If you find it hard to consider which piece of the pie is the most critical, you're not alone. The intersections of the various aspects of our identities, our gender, our race, our sexual orientation, etc., make us who we are and shape how we experience the world. For queer people of color, however, there is often a request, and sometimes a requirement, to make such a choice around aspects of their identity. For many queer people of color, the question becomes "Which is more important to you, being (insert race here) or being queer"?

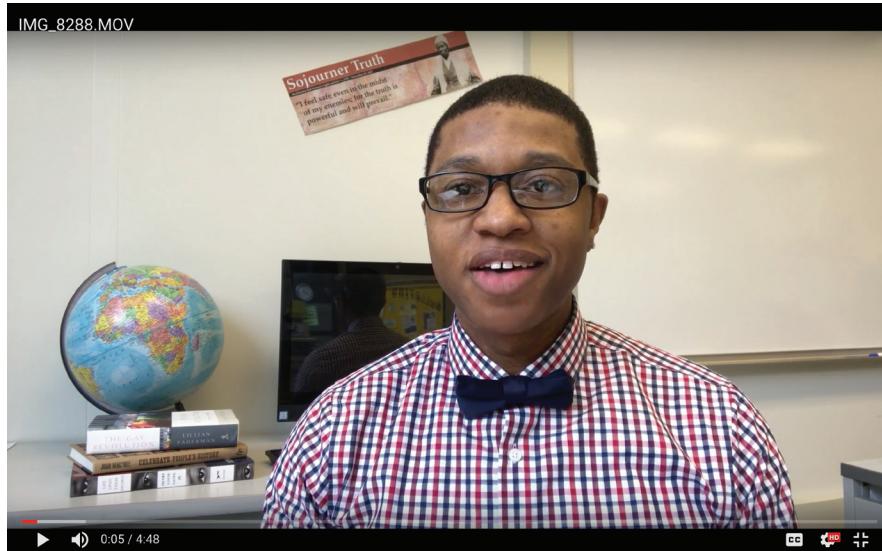
As you think about the ways in which the components of your identity intersect, you might find it difficult to divorce one aspect of your identity from another. For many LGBTQ people of color, no matter which answer a person gives about which aspect of their identity is more critical, there is never a correct one because the intersection of these two key aspects of their identity is a key component of what makes them who they are.

In this lesson, we will focus on the distinct experiences of people of color, and how being a person of color intersects with being a queer person in a variety of spaces. To ground us in a common understanding, we share three data points with you today:

- There are more than 1 million LGBTQ African Americans currently living in the United States, with approximately 3.7 percent of all African American people identifying as LGBTQ (Williams Institute).
- Latinos/Latinas made up 17.4 percent of the total U.S. population in 2014. (Pew Research Center)
There are approximately 1.4 million LGBTQ Latino/a adults currently living in the United States. (Williams Institute) Of the 146,000 Latino/a same-sex households in the U.S., 29.1 percent are raising children.
- There are at least 325,000 LGBTQ Asians and Pacific Islanders currently living in the U.S., and nearly 33,000 are in same-sex partnerships. One-third of those couples live in California, Hawaii or New York. (Williams Institute)

As we go through this session, we encourage you to consider valuable parts of yourself and your personal identity that you may have been forced to hide or ignore completely, depending on where you are or with whom you are engaging, and to consider the question: "How can I produce safe spaces within my community where people feel they can be their whole and authentic selves?"

A Video Message from a Lesson Writer



Lesson 3, Video #1:

It Gets Better — Quinton Clemons

*Social Studies Teacher at Dyett High School for the Arts
Chicago, Illinois*

Originally Uploaded: May 4, 2017

Length: 4 minutes, 48 seconds

"I look on television, and I see all kinds of people who represent all of the different sections of my person."

NOTE:

All of the videos included in this lesson plan can be found at

[www.itgetsbetter.org/FindingPride.](http://www.itgetsbetter.org/FindingPride)

Videos and Questions

This section is the heart of the lesson plan. It is filled with stories of real people, talking about real experiences. Each story was contributed online to the *It Gets Better* video campaign and has been chosen because of its connection to this lesson plan's theme. The videos are all followed by questions that inspire discussion and further inquiry. You can watch them all at once, or you can choose the ones you think are particularly meaningful for your intended audience.



Lesson 3, Video #2:

Boston Lesbians of Color: It Can Get Better

Originally Uploaded: January 15, 2011
Length: 12 minutes, 14 seconds

"I am an artist, educator, activist...person."

Questions:

1. Why do you think this group made this video? Why do you think this video was chosen for this topic?
2. Explain the differences and similarities in the experiences of the women in this video. What brings them together?
3. Have you ever felt like there weren't any spaces where you could be loved for all of your identities?
Have you ever felt totally embraced for who you are? Explain how those differing experiences affect you.



Lesson 3, Video #3:

**It Gets Better:
Story of a Muslim-
American Kid
Coming Out**

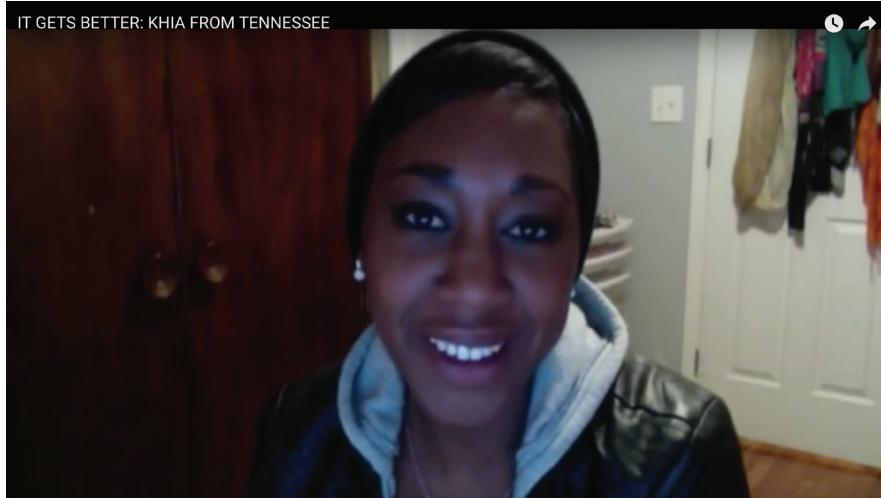
Originally Uploaded: July 8, 2011

Length: 9 minutes, 48 seconds

“High school is not the end of your life. High school is the beginning. . .you have the rest of your life to grow and develop and to be who you are and to be proud of who you are.”

Questions:

1. Why do you think Tay made this video? Why do you think this video was chosen for this topic?
2. What was the role of Tay's religious and ethnic identity in his coming out story?
3. How does Tay's mother react to him coming out, and what do you think influenced her response?
4. What representation do you see in the media or in your community of LGBTQ people from the Middle East or of Middle Eastern heritage? How does that influence your understanding of Tay's story?



Lesson 3, Video #4:

It Gets Better: Khia from Tennessee

Originally Uploaded: March 30, 2014
Length: 7 minutes, 44 seconds

“I am a triple threat. I am black, I’m a woman, and I am gay.”

Questions:

1. Why do you think Khia chose to make this video? Why do you think this video was chosen for this topic?
2. How has Khia’s being a person of color affected her experience as a queer person?
3. Why does Khia bring up the fact that she is a person of color, but her spouse is not? What kind of impact do you think that dynamic has had on their relationship?
4. Are there messages from this video that help you understand Khia’s experiences, even if you haven’t experienced them yourself?

For Further Reflection and Discussion

For Personal Reflection:

1. If moments in these videos resonate with you, reflect on the extent to which your own experience is similar to that of the people in the videos. What do you have in common that might make it so? If these videos represent an experience very different from your own, what have you learned about others' experiences that could change the way you approach the world?
2. What stereotypes have you encountered regarding different racial groups' relationship to the LGBTQ community? How do the stereotypes differ between groups?
3. Which stereotypes have personally impacted you in some way (whether you feel that someone has pre-judged you based on a stereotype or you were led to believe one)?
4. Have you ever felt targeted for something about yourself that you can't control? What experiences in your life have helped you overcome this adversity?

For Group Discussion:

1. How have social, economic, and/or political circumstances for people of color changed over time? How has that mobility changed how certain groups experience privilege, or a lack thereof?
2. Occasionally, people who carry one identity are at odds with people who carry another. If you identify in both ways, how should you navigate through conversations with these people?
3. In what ways does being a person of color and LGBTQ change both of those experiences? How do these two identities intersect? Are there messages from the videos that can help you understand that experience if it is not your own? Are there parts of the videos that resonate with you if you carry both of these identifiers?
4. What were some of the positive aspects of being an LGBTQ person of color seen in the videos? What challenges specific to their identities did the individuals in the videos express?
5. In what ways have you seen the experiences of LGBTQ people of color trivialized? What can your group do to help fight this invisibility?

Activity

Identity Web

OBJECTIVE: Students will be able to identify the ways in which components of their identity intersect, or do not intersect, to influence their actions, thoughts, beliefs, and life experience.

MATERIALS: Student notebooks, legal-sized or larger white paper, writing utensils, markers or other coloring supplies.

PREPARATION: Each student will need one large piece of white paper and art supplies.

DESCRIPTION: Each student will develop an identity web and identify the ways in which their identities overlap, intersect, or remain separate in their lived experiences.

Instructions:

1. Before passing out the larger papers and art supplies, ask students to make a list of all the sections of their identity. Have them begin to consider the ways in which their identities intersect; whether there are components of their identities that they share in some contexts, but not in others; or if there are parts of their identities that are more important to them on a daily basis. If students are struggling to think of pieces of their identity, you can share the following list:

Gender Expression

Ethnic/Racial Group

Religion

Occupation/Level of Education

Sexual Orientation

Age

Ability

Social Groups/Sports/Hobbies

Nationality

Language

2. Next, have them identify anyone who has influenced components of their identity, including friends, family members, their community, and the media.

3. Explain that they are going to create identity webs, or visual representations, of how the components of their identity and the influences over it affect the ways in which they think about their identity and experience the world.

4. Students can create this web, and represent their identity, in any way that they choose. The only requirements are that their names should be visible at the center of the page, and, if necessary, there should be a key representing the various connections between aspects of their identity. Students should also write a brief (1–2 paragraph) description of their map and what they have represented. If students are struggling to consider connections, have them look back to the influencers list and consider which components of their identity are more important within which groups. Have them also consider the ways in which power systems influence the ways in which they experience the world based on their personal identity markers.

5. After allowing students to work, ask for volunteers to share their web. Have other students ask questions of each presenter. Here are a few guiding questions if students are still struggling to think about the intersections of components of their personal identity:

- a.** Which part of your identity do you most connect with?
- b.** Did you have difficulty deciding which part is the most important or where to place things? Why or why not?
- c.** What stereotypes have you encountered because of your identity? Do you encounter different stereotypes depending on the person with whom you are interacting? Why or why not?
- d.** Have you ever felt targeted for something about yourself that you can't control? What experiences in your life have helped you overcome this adversity?

6. At the end, have students do a silent five-minute written reflection, “If you could not or cannot share an aspect of your identity with your friends, family, or community, how would/does that feel? What do we sacrifice when we cannot share our authentic selves with others?”

Additional Ideas for Engagement:

- 1.** Conduct a series of interviews of members of your community. Collect personal stories and perceptions from many different people. Collate these stories to find common themes and ideas amongst the interviews. Find a way to present this information—in writing, aloud, in a video series—to the wider community.
- 2.** As a group, create a spoken word or other performance that presents some of these ideas. Plan a venue to deliver your spoken word pieces.
- 3.** Collect six-word stories from members of your community. If members are comfortable, take a picture of each holding their own story. If not, collect the stories anonymously. Display these stories for the larger community. [Note: You can find many websites online about six-word stories.]

Conclusion

After hearing these stories, we hope you leave this lesson with one clear message: For many LGBTQ people of color, there can be a real conflict between compartmentalizing aspects of their personal identity (am I Latina or am I LGBTQ?) and living an authentic life as their whole selves. In a world where race and privilege affect the ways in which people navigate the world, the added component of being LGBTQ can often create barriers within the few safe spaces that may be accessible to people of color. In turn, LGBTQ people of color can find themselves having to make the difficult choice to live authentically as an openly LGBTQ member of their racial or ethnic community and risk the potential of being ostracized or discriminated against within their own community.

We encourage you to continue to grow as an ally and to advocate for both the LGBTQ community and communities of color. From incorporating LGBTQ heroes and heroines of color into cultural history months, to reaching out to our state senators around school safety issues, there are a multitude of ways to stand up for the rights of LGBTQ people of color and create a more welcoming and inclusive environment for all.

Pride and Gender

Materials Needed

Computer or laptop, projector, speakers, and Internet connection that allows access to YouTube.com

Notes to the Educator or Discussion Leader

Have you ever walked down the toy aisles at a big chain store? Hundreds of dolls in every color, shape, and size are segregated from science kits and blocks; princesses and horses are located far from super heroes and soccer balls. Walking the toy aisles is a clear experiment in what is considered gender normative in today's society.

But what if gender is a spectrum? Often, we correlate the sex, or biological identification of male or female, with the gender identity of the person. But for many in the LGBTQ community, gender identity, gender expression, sex, and sexual orientation, and the intersectionality of these identity markers, interact to create a much more complex and complete picture of who we are as individuals.

Increased attention in the media, both by reputable sources and in attention-grabbing click-bait, has put gender issues front and center. However, the media's portrayal of gender normative behaviors and experiences, coupled with our lived experiences, often precludes many who identify as "other" from having access to safe spaces and, in some cases, basic human dignity. For example, recent cases around transgendered individuals' use of bathrooms associated with their gender identity have dominated the news cycle and have produced some complex reactions from the public. Caitlin Jenner's transition from male to female became a leading story from the Huffington Post to ESPN, causing many to consider the role of gender identity in sports and celebrity. And terms such as "lipstick lesbian," "butch," and "boi" have become mainstream in explaining gender expression inside and outside of the LGBTQ community, moving from derogatory terms in some cases to self-proclaimed labels of pride.

For many, stepping out of gender norms can draw unwanted attention, cause anxiety, and produce feelings of disconnection from others. Gender identity and expression are very personal and sensitive aspects of our personality that drive our sense of self; by creating a safe environment in which to unpack gender norms, we can uncover biases, struggles, and opportunities to create a more loving and accepting community. Learning about and experiencing the trials of real people from various walks of life is a critical part of understanding how we are all different, and exposes underlying feelings and emotions that can tear down walls and build bridges within our community.

By relating to one another through sharing our lived experiences with gender and identity, we help to build safe spaces for people to feel comfortable and respected. For many, these topics can feel taboo, but by providing a space to explore these topics in a safe, informed, and respectful environment, we can better address misconceptions, combat hate, and promote a sense of community through respect for our individuality.

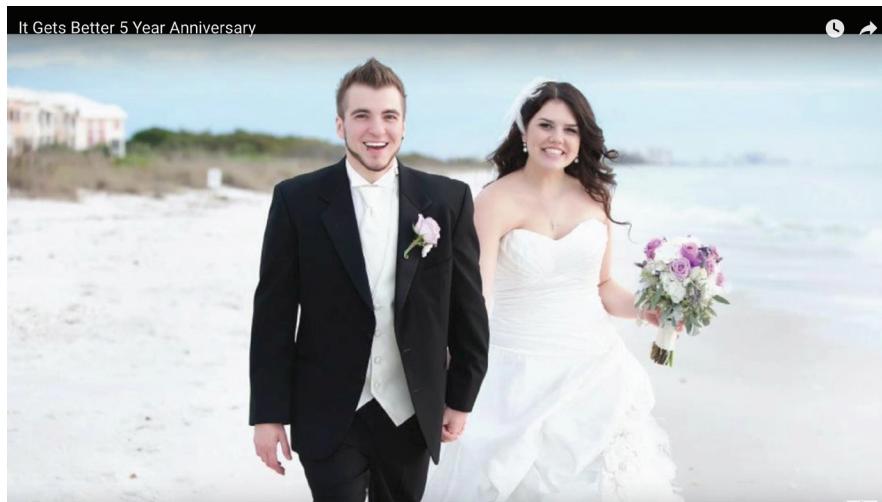
As we experience this session, we encourage you to consider the ways in which you think about normative gender roles and the ways in which you express your gender identity. What would it be like for you to feel that the way you look on the outside is different from the way you feel on the inside? Have you ever experienced that tension? And how can we create safe spaces for all people, regardless of their gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation?

NOTE:

All of the videos included in this lesson plan can be found at
www.itgetsbetter.org/FindingPride.

Videos and Questions

This section is the heart of the lesson plan. It is filled with stories of real people, talking about real experiences. Each story was contributed online to the ***It Gets Better*** video campaign and has been chosen because of its connection to this lesson plan's theme. They are all followed by unique questions that inspire discussion and further inquiry. You can watch them all back-to-back, or you can pick and choose which ones you think are particularly meaningful for your intended audience.



Lesson 4, Video #1:

It Gets Better: 5-Year Anniversary (Aydian Dowling)

Originally Uploaded:
December 11, 2015
Length: 2 minutes, 53 seconds

“It Gets Better opened up my mind to the possibilities of life, to feeling worthy of sharing my story [as a transgender man].”

Questions:

1. Back in 2012, Aydian and his wife, Jenilee, appeared on the MTV special “It Gets Better” to share their experience as a transgender man and a cisgender woman trying to get married. What kind of challenges do you think they faced in that process?
2. How do you think gender plays a role in Aydian and Jenilee’s relationship? How important do you think it is for Jenilee to understand and support Aydian in his gender identity? Explain.
3. Aydian says that working with It Gets Better made him feel supported: “It made me feel like I had allies, even though it didn’t really feel like I had allies.” What do you think he meant by that?



Lesson 4, Video #2:

**It Gets Better
(A Personal Story
of a Nerdy Chinese
Butch)**

Originally Uploaded: October 2, 2010

Length: 8 minutes, 57 seconds

“When you’re bullied... you think you’re all alone and that nobody cares, but that’s just not true.”

Questions:

1. This speaker in this video identifies as a “nerdy, Chinese butch.” Why do you think those identities matter to this person? What identities do you embrace that make you different or unique?
2. This person shared that, unlike other people, they didn’t “develop into one of the two genders.” What do you think they meant by that? How did that impact their experience growing up?
3. “I was simply the most convenient target. I was different.” Do you know of anyone in your school that might experience this kind of bullying? How can you make them feel better supported and included?



Lesson 4, Video #3:

"It Gets Better"
from Students at
Harvard College

Originally Uploaded:
February 12, 2012
Length: 9 minutes, 18 seconds

"I found that the people who have actually accepted me the most are the people I would have found least likely to according to stereotypes we build about them."

Questions:

1. Many of these Harvard students talk about how gender norms affected their experiences growing up. Do you think those same norms about gender exist today? How have they stayed the same, or how have they changed over time?
2. Some of these individuals shared that it seemed to be obvious to others what their sexual orientation was, even when it wasn't obvious to them. Do you think that guessing or assuming someone's sexual orientation and/or gender identity is problematic? Why or why not?
3. Talking to that one person—that friend, or that teacher—can make all the difference. Who is someone at your school that you think you could talk to? What qualities does that person have that inspire your trust?



Lesson 4, Video #4:

Transgender (FTM): It Gets Better

Originally Uploaded: April 5, 2014
Length: 5 minutes, 15 seconds

“I feel like right now in my life that what I really need is just to talk to somebody. And that’s taking a step in the right direction to change something I’m not happy about in my life.”

Questions:

1. Sammy talks about decisions that can be particularly stressful for transgender kids, like choosing to go on hormones, undergoing gender affirmation surgery, or changing their legal name. How do these things relate to gender expression?
2. “I think it’s important to remember that you do have control over some things.” What would you add to the list of things Sammy says transgender kids control? What do you think could be empowering about those doing those things?
3. Patience seems to be a key theme in Sammy’s message. Why might patience be a hard thing to have when things aren’t going so well? Why might patience be the answer?

**Lesson 4, Video #5:****Transgender
In Maine —
It Gets Better
(Captioned)****Originally Uploaded:** October 8, 2010**Length:** 9 minutes, 49 seconds

“Life is not always what you expect. People can be kind, and ultimately, more people are going to be in support of you than against you.”

Questions:

1. Jean identifies as a transsexual lesbian. Can you describe what those identities mean in your own words? (NOTE: You can use the glossary at the end of this guide if you need help.)
2. Jean says she began to have a concept of who she was in terms of her gender identity as early as age three. How does that compare to your experience understanding your personal gender identity? How do you think that compares to others?
3. Jean used crossdressing as a way to express her gender at an early age. What are some ways you express your gender identity?

For Further Reflection and Discussion

For Personal Reflection:

1. How do you define and express your gender? What messages or experiences have made you think this way? Who or what has influenced, supported, or interfered with your gender expression? Were there things you felt you should or shouldn't do because of stereotypes or the desire to fulfill a gender role?
2. How did your household as you grew up expect you to fulfill stereotypes surrounding a particular gender? Were there things you felt you should or shouldn't do because people perceived you as one gender or another? How did these expectations make you feel?
3. How did your understanding of gender roles change as you got older? Did the schools you went to influence your understanding of these roles? Are there other social institutions or communities that informed your perception of gender roles?
4. Which people in your life don't act like a "typical boy" or a "typical girl"? What makes these people seem that way to you? How have they changed your understanding of gender?
5. In what other ways do gender roles shape your society? Which realms of society do you find the most obviously gendered? Which do you find the most gender neutral or inclusive?

For Group Discussion:

1. What other aspects of society are influenced or guided by our binary system and gender roles? In what ways can life be confusing, challenging, or frightening for those that do not fit in with these roles? What benefits to society and the individual can arise from confronting these norms?
2. Why might people change their attitudes or the way they treat individuals once they come out, even if their gender expression remains the same?
3. How do portrayals of men and women in the media reinforce or complicate gender stereotypes? Can you still enjoy shows and movies that you find problematic in this way? How can you address these issues while you're watching with friends or family?
4. As a group, spend time discussing and dissecting the following terms from this guide's glossary: *gender identity*, *gender expression*, *sex*, *cisgender*, *transgender*, *gender nonconforming*, and *genderfluid*. How are these terms related? What makes them unique? How do these terms influence or interact with each other?
5. How can you help create a safe space and respect for all gender expressions? What comments or questions are appropriate to ask others about their gender expression and identity? What questions or comments are inappropriate?



Activity

Gender Self-Portrait

This activity was adapted with permission from the “Gender Self-Portrait” activity by the Pride Education Network.

(See <http://pridenet.ca/wp-content/uploads/the-gender-spectrum.pdf>, pg. 37.)

OBJECTIVE: Students will be able to think critically about the ways traditional gender expectations limit self-expression and undermine self-respect.

MATERIALS: Legal-sized piece of paper for each student; assortment of magazines, photographs, and newspapers; scissors, colored pencils or markers.

PREPARATION: Each student will need one piece of paper and access to other materials.

DESCRIPTION: Students will each have a paper to fold to represent their external and internal selves. After a discussion around gender expectations, students will develop collages of how the world sees them (or how they express themselves on the outside) versus their internal thoughts and feelings. Students will share their collages and debrief the activity.

Instructions:

1. Facilitate a discussion in which students discuss expectations of how they, or males or females in general, are expected to look and act because of their gender. Encourage students to reflect on the expectations held by their friends, family, school, and the media.

Sample Questions

- a. What are some of your earliest memories of understanding what gender you were? How did you know? What did you think that meant you were supposed to be or do?
- b. Who do you think has had the biggest impact on your sense of gender: your family, your friends, the media, or the general culture?
- c. What are some of the things you like most about being your gender? What are some of the things you like least?
- d. How is your experience of gender different from the experience of your parents' or grandparents' generation? What would you like people older than you to understand?

2. Distribute the pieces of paper and tell students to fold the paper in half the long way. Then have them fold each side to the fold in the middle. (The paper should look like two doors that meet in the middle.)

- 3.** Explain that each student should create a collage that demonstrates gender expectations they encounter on a daily basis, and reflects on how their identity might fit in with or challenge expectations.
- 4.** Explain that the inside of the flaps represents who the student really is, while the outside of the flaps represents who they are expected to be, based on gender.
- 5.** Provide access to magazines, newspapers, and art supplies and give them 20-30 minutes to work on the collage.
- 6.** Bring the group together and invite volunteers to share their collages. Elicit ways that traditional gender expectations are enforced.

Sample Questions

- a.** Where was it easiest to find pictures and words to use for the collage?
- b.** Where do you find the most tension between your internal expectations and the expectations of society?
- c.** If your internal expectations and those of society closely matched: What do you think could be difficult for someone whose internal feelings and external expectations are different? What could be the repercussions for not having these expectations in alignment?
- d.** If your internal expectations and those of society looked different: Was there anything you were nervous to share about your gender identity based on expectations or what you saw being shared around you?
- e.** What does this exercise make you think about the ways in which we represent traditional gender expectations among our friends, family, and community, or in the media?

Additional Ideas for Engagement:

- 1.** While transgender rights are currently at the forefront of many political debates, people often don't entirely understand transgender individuals and issues. First, educate yourselves as a group on these issues. Identify some of the misconceptions most prevalent in your community. Plan an educational media campaign (e.g., a series of posters, a video, a presentation) that can help clear up some of these misconceptions.
- 2.** Think about the physical spaces you inhabit that are segregated by gender. In what ways might a trans person be uncomfortable in these spaces? What could you do to make them more comfortable for trans individuals? Write a proposal to the board or manager of a public space that would address some of these issues.
- 3.** Host a screening of a film or series that details the experience of trans people. Organize a discussion after the screening.

Conclusion

After hearing these stories, we hope you leave this lesson with one clear message: we express gender in a multitude of different ways. For LGBTQ individuals, the intersection between gender and sexuality can add an additional layer to the complexity of navigating a sometimes difficult and unwelcoming world. For many LGBTQ individuals, the complexity of gender expression can be the first identity marker that gains negative attention from those around them, long before they have come out about their sexual orientation.

From the ways in which we dress to the manner in which we cross our legs to the toys we choose to play with, the ways in which we express our gender plays a role in acceptance from a very young age, often triggering an understanding that something might be different about us. Though not the experience of all LGBTQ individuals, gender identity and expression can play a significant role in the coming out experiences of many community members. By diving into our own gender expression, our biases around gender normativity, and our experiences in how our friends, families, and communities affect our beliefs on gender, we have the opportunity to act as allies within our society, creating safe spaces to allow every member of our community to live an authentic life.

As an extension of this lesson, encourage students to research more about transgender history and visibility or to plan an activity for the Transgender Day of Visibility on March 31st.



Pride and Faith

Materials Needed

Computer or laptop, projector, speakers, and Internet connection that allows access to YouTube.com

Notes to the Educator or Discussion Leader

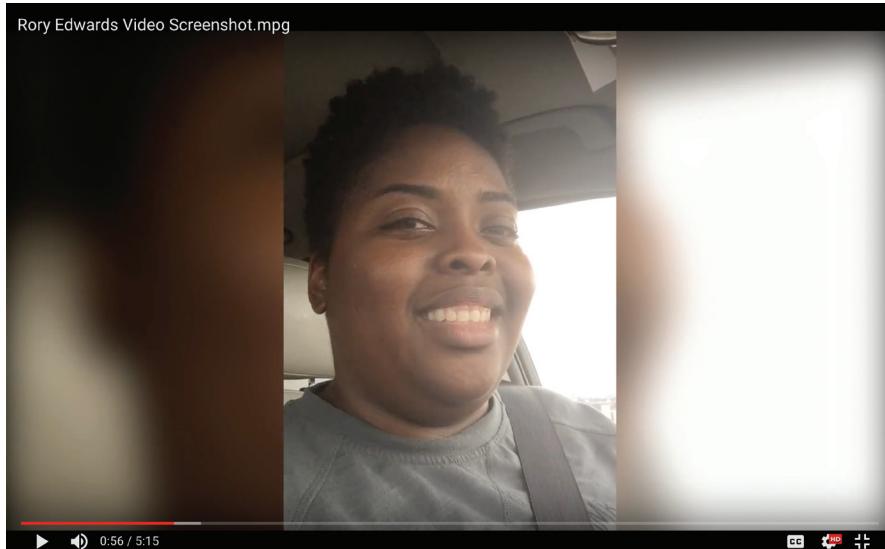
Think back to the most challenging experience of your life. How did you feel? To whom did you turn for help? Loss, sorrow, and hardship are all part of the human experience, from grieving the passing of loved ones, to experiencing divorce or breaking off meaningful relationships, to making extremely challenging decisions. These experiences may leave us feeling lost or isolated, questioning our existence or our faith in others. We may turn to our friends, our family, or our community for strength and guidance. We may lean on others in times of need.

At times of difficulty or stress, many people choose to turn to spirituality or faith for support. However, for some LGBTQ individuals, their church, mosque, synagogue, or place of worship that may have served as a safe haven in the past may not be accessible or may not be as welcoming if they have come out, leading to additional feelings of loss.

Beyond this, identity within a religion and a religious community can be an important part of many people's lives. For LGBTQ individuals, faith and religious identity may come into conflict with the beliefs of an individual church, synagogue, mosque or other religious institution. According to a Pew Research Center survey, 29% of LGBTQ adults "have been made to feel unwelcome in places of worship." The intersection of a person's gender expression, sexual orientation, and religion can sometimes leave LGBTQ believers at a crossroads of having to choose between living their authentic lives or remaining a part of a religious community.

In this lesson, we will discover how some LGBTQ individuals identify as believers, how their belief systems and the structures of their religious institutions have intersected with their sexual orientation and/or gender identity, and how they have remained faithful or changed their beliefs over time due to their experiences. In some of the videos we will explore today, LGBTQ people are eager to be involved, invested, and present in their faith, and yet many still, due to their experiences within their religious institutions, experience challenges to their faith as they live their lives as their authentic selves.

A Video Message from a Lesson Writer



Lesson 5, Video #1:

It Gets Better — Rhori Edwards

Middle School Humanities Teacher
Austin, TX

Originally Uploaded: May 11, 2017
Length: 5 minutes, 15 seconds

“Because words build nations, because words create ideals, because words inspire others to take action.”

NOTE:

All of the videos included in this lesson plan can be found at
www.itgetsbetter.org/FindingPride.

Videos and Questions

This section is the heart of the lesson plan. It is filled with stories of real people, talking about real experiences. Each story was contributed online to the *It Gets Better* video campaign and has been chosen because of its connection to this lesson plan's theme. The videos are all followed by questions that inspire discussion and further inquiry. You can watch them all at once, or you can choose the ones you think are particularly meaningful for your intended audience.



Lesson 5, Video #2:

Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, It Gets Better

Originally Uploaded: October 10, 2011

Length: 1 minute, 49 seconds

“We should support each other as an act of true Ubuntu.”

Questions:

1. Why do you think this video was selected? Do you think Archbishop Tutu's perspective is important on this issue?
2. Why does Archbishop Tutu connect the struggles for freedom in South Africa to the concept of "It Gets Better?"
3. Why do you think Archbishop Tutu notes all the efforts that have been taken in South Africa to protect and uplift LGBTQ citizens? How do those compare to efforts to protect and uplift LGBTQ citizens in the United States?
4. Ubuntu is an African philosophy, loosely translated to "the belief in a universal bond of sharing that connects all humanity." What does Archbishop Tutu mean by the quote, "We should support each other as an act of true Ubuntu?"



Lesson 5, Video #3:

It Gets Better at Brigham Young University

Originally Uploaded: April 5, 2012

Length: 9 minutes, 36 seconds

“I found peace when I started helping other people.”

Questions:

1. How did these students' religious upbringing intersect with their sexual orientation and/or gender expression?
2. What role did the Understanding Same-Gender Attraction (USGA) group play in improving some of these students' experiences?
3. Mark has a hard time saying, “It Gets Better.” Why do you think that is? How does his sister, as a straight ally, influence Mark's story?
4. According to the BYU video, “74% of students contemplated suicide, and 24% attempted to commit suicide.” Are these numbers surprising to you? Why or why not? In your opinion, how could BYU improve the experiences of its LGBTQ student body?

"It Gets Better" from the University Catholic Center at UCLA



Lesson 5, Video #4:

"It Gets Better" from the University Catholic Center at UCLA

Originally Uploaded: October 23, 2013
Length: 2 minutes, 38 seconds

"As a mother, if one of my sons was to come out to me, the most important thing would be for me to make sure they knew that I loved them completely."

Questions:

1. "God made me, perfectly." How does this statement compare with the idea of LGBTQ people not being welcomed or accepted in many places of worship?
2. Why do you think the makers of this video included straight allies? What do you think is the role of straight allies in communities of faith that accept LGBTQ members?
3. How do you think we can support the creation of more groups of faith like this one that is accepting of LGBTQ people?



Lesson 5, Video #5:

Jewish LGBTQ at GLOE, Washington DCJCC: Strength Through Community and It Gets Better

Originally Uploaded: December 11, 2010
Length: 8 minutes, 31 seconds

“I definitely used to think that I had to choose between being gay and having a partner, and being religious.”

Questions:

1. What is the call to action for the allies? Why is this important?
2. According to Rabbi Shira, what is each of us tasked to do? Why is that important to this group of people?
3. Harvey refers to being Jewish and gay as a valuable combination. What does he mean by this?



Lesson 5, Video #6:

Transgender Faith Leaders Summit

Originally Uploaded: November 10, 2010

Length: 4 minutes, 51 seconds

“You are loved. You are appreciated. And you are holy.”

Questions:

1. Why do you think this video was chosen for this topic?
2. The concept of love has come up in many videos, and nearly every person in this video mentions love. Why do you think the concepts of love plays such a prominent role in videos discussing the intersection of faith, sexuality, and gender expression?
3. This video shows a variety of religious leaders from varied backgrounds, economic statuses, and religious beliefs standing together. Why is that important, and what is the central message they are sharing?

For Further Reflection and Discussion

For Personal Reflection:

1. Is there any participant in these videos who resonates with you? If so, does this person share your faith tradition? What about this person's story speaks to you?
2. How would you describe your own relationship to faith, either now or in the past?
3. How does your faith community (if you have one) respond to LGBTQ people? How do you personally relate to your community's stance on LGBTQ people?
4. If you do not identify as a person of faith, how do you respond to the stories and messages shared in these videos? In what ways do their perspectives feel different from your own? In what ways are they similar to your own?

For Group Discussion:

1. Historically, many faith traditions have been unwelcoming or hostile to LGBTQ people. What about religious faith lends itself to this antipathy? (Speak from your own experience).
2. Why do you think more faith traditions are now becoming places of welcome and acceptance for LGBTQ people? (Speak from your own experience).
3. Rabbi Shira Stutman of 6th and I Synagogue in Washington, D.C., says,

"You don't need me as a rabbi to sit here and tell you that there are some texts in our tradition that come out 'against' homosexuality, whatever that means. But what I do want to say today is that there are other texts, there are laws, there are values, that supersede these other ones, and that come out strongly in favor of love, of the idea that each of us was created in the image of God."

How do you respond to the idea that, while certain elements of faith traditions may not be affirming of LGBTQ people, there are other elements—perhaps more important—that call people of faith to a loving, affirmative response to LGBTQ people? Can you think of examples from your own experience?

4. Thought experiment: Imagine that a friend of yours, a young person from a particular faith tradition (perhaps yours) has just confided in you that they identify as LGBTQ, and they are struggling with how to integrate their gender identity or sexual orientation with their faith. What advice would you offer to this friend?

Activity

Identity Acrostic Poems

OBJECTIVE: Students will be able to develop an acrostic poem that shares intersections of their personal identity and their lived experience.

MATERIALS: Paper, writing utensil, paper and art supplies (if desired), image of an identity wheel such as the one from the Johns Hopkins University at http://web.jhu.edu/dlc/resources/diversity_wheel/index.html (optional)

PREPARATION: Each student will need a writing utensil, as well as paper and art supplies, if you choose to have them publish more artistically.

DESCRIPTION: Each student will write an acrostic poem that in some way represents their identity and the intersections of the components of their identity. They may choose their name or another word that is important to them as the key to their acrostic.

Instructions:

1. Explain that students will be creating identity acrostic poems today.
2. Share that an **acrostic poem** is a type of **poetry** where the first, last, or other letters in a line spell out a particular word or phrase. The most common and simple form of an **acrostic poem** is where the first letters of each line spell out the word or phrase. The writer can place the stem words in the beginning, middle, or end of the lines of poetry. If needed, share this video to show examples of acrostic poems: <https://youtu.be/acr7nckx05I>
3. Given that this acrostic poem will be about identity, students should first brainstorm words, phrases, and ideas that tie into key components of their identity. To help them get started, consider sharing the identity wheel at http://web.jhu.edu/dlc/resources/diversity_wheel/index.html. Students should identify a key word, either their name or another word or short phrase that will serve as the “backbone” to their acrostic poem.
4. After brainstorming, students should begin crafting their acrostic poem. You can also provide them with paper and art supplies, if desired, to add additional creativity to their poem.

5. Ask for volunteers to share their poems. Allow students to ask questions and provide compliments and constructive feedback on the poems. Students can reflect as a group or do a written reflection on one or more of the questions below:

- a. How did you approach this activity when considering your own identity?
- b. What was easy about this and what proved to be difficult?
- c. Were there any components of your identity you purposely chose to include or not to include? Why or why not?

Additional Ideas for Engagement:

1. Visit some of the online LGBTQ-friendly faith communities listed below. Look for ways to connect with people who are asking questions or need support.

Gay Christian Network

Metropolitan Community Church

Unitarian Universalist Association

Kurlander Program for GLBT Outreach and Encouragement (GLOE) at Washington DC Jewish Community Center

Jewish Queer Youth (JQY)

DignityUSA (Catholic)

Affirmation (Mormon)

Muslims for Progressive Values (MPV)

2. If you are a person of faith, search within your own tradition for ministries or programs that support LGBTQ people. (Beware of non-affirming programs that speak of “changing” orientation or that put restrictions on queer relationships.) If such resources are not available in your area, talk with trusted friends or mentors about the possibility of creating one. Reach out through some of the resources above to connect with people who have done this.

3. Is there someone in your life who you know is struggling with their faith and sexuality or gender identity? Find a way to support or encourage that person. Let them know they are not alone. (You may choose to do this anonymously if you feel it would be better received.)

Conclusion

After hearing these stories, we hope you and your students leave this lesson understanding that for LGBTQ individuals, the intersectionality of faith and religious background, along with their identification as an LGBTQ person, can lead individuals to a range of experiences, from questioning their faith, to being shunned by their community, to feeling closer to God and to others that share their beliefs. For some people of faith, there are opportunities to find programs and institutions within their own traditions that are accepting and supportive of LGBTQ people. For others, it is harder to believe there is a place for them after their experiences in their church, synagogue, or other religious institution. Regardless of a person's background, we can support and encourage people that are struggling with their faith and their sexuality and/or gender identity by expressing our deep care and understanding for the difficulties they may be encountering.

As homework, encourage your students to learn more about the ways in which different faiths view and treat LGBTQ issues and experiences. The Human Rights Campaign has many resources regarding faith and LGBTQ issues, including a [Christian Conversation Guide](#), that can be a good starting place for people who seek to create safer and more inclusive spaces for LGBTQ individuals.



Pride and Family

Materials Needed

Computer or laptop, projector, speakers, and Internet connection that allows access to YouTube.com

Notes to the Educator or Discussion Leader

For many people, our parents, siblings, and other family members are our first friends, our first confidants, and the first people we go to when we are struggling with a challenge or celebrating a success. For many LGBTQ individuals, the moment we come out to our parents and/or siblings is often a defining experience in our lives. These moments are so significant for us as LGBTQ individuals that the sharing of our coming out stories with our LGBTQ peers is a unique and almost ritual practice of our community.

Most LGBTQ individuals are born into families of heterosexuals, and in turn, we do not always see our own sexual identity represented within our family units. For many of us, we do not have family members to serve as mentors and guides to support us as we navigate and experience our own minority status. Beyond this, family members can also be hostile to members coming out, leaving LGBTQ children feeling like they have nowhere else to turn to for support. This rejection can be extremely damaging to LGBTQ individuals, especially LGBTQ youth. The Family Acceptance Project at San Francisco State University found that LGBTQ youth from highly rejecting families are “more than 8 times as likely to have attempted suicide, nearly 6 times as likely to report high levels of depression, more than 3 times as likely to use illegal drugs, and more than 3 times as likely to be at high risk for HIV and sexually transmitted diseases.”¹

¹ <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/publications/424-glbtyouth?tmpl=component>

In the modern history of LGBTQ people, the relationship between homosexuality and the nuclear family has been the source of much anxiety, perpetrating a common myth that parents or home life can “cause” homosexual orientation. Theories from the past are often contradictory, with the archetype of a “cold” mother or an “overly affectionate” mother serving as the root of male same-sex attraction. This idea persists today, especially among those people who claim they can cure people of their homosexual desires or gender variance. Despite this notion, there is no evidence that family relationships affect whether someone identifies as LGBTQ.²

Increasingly, LGBTQ couples are raising their own children. There are a multitude of ways in which LGBTQ individuals become families, through surrogacy, previous partnerships, or adoption. Nationwide, there has been political and social anxiety around the idea of same sex parenting. However, multiple studies have demonstrated no data to suggest negative effects on children parented by same-sex couples.³

As we go through this session, we will see that families are complex social structures, where people can feel a deep need to be totally honest while also struggling with anxiety about living an open and out life. Regardless of how we personally identify, we likely have all experienced the complexity of navigating our own family dynamic.

In this lesson, we will discuss many of the different aspects of family life that LGBTQ people face. We will seek to understand the pain of keeping a part of ourselves secret from some of the people we are closest to, as well as the joys of sharing our authentic selves with our families, including our “chosen” families within our community, to live an open life.

2 <https://www.apa.org/topics/lgbt/orientation.pdf>

3 <http://whatweknow.law.columbia.edu/topics/lgbt-equality/what-does-the-scholarly-research-say-about-the-wellbeing-of-children-with-gay-or-lesbian-parents/>

A Video Message from a Lesson Writer



Lesson 6, Video #1:

It Gets Better — Xander Piper

7th Grade Humanities Teacher
San Francisco, CA

Date Uploaded: April 29, 2017
Length: 11 minutes, 36 seconds

“It gets a little bit harder before it gets better, but it does get better.”

NOTE:

All of the videos included in this lesson plan can be found at
www.itgetsbetter.org/FindingPride.

Videos and Questions

This section is the heart of the lesson plan. It is filled with stories of real people, talking about real experiences. Each story was contributed online to the *It Gets Better* video campaign and has been chosen because of its connection to this lesson plan's theme. The videos are all followed by questions that inspire discussion and further inquiry. You can watch them all at once, or you can choose the ones you think are particularly meaningful for your intended audience.



Lesson 6, Video #2:

It Gets Better: Parents of Transgender Children

Date Uploaded: March 20, 2012

Length: 2 minutes, 5 seconds

“Your kids are incredibly resilient, incredibly brave for coming out and letting you know what they are feeling and what they are thinking.”

Questions:

1. PFLAG stands for Parents and Family/Friends of Lesbians and Gays. It's a nonprofit organization that helps parents of LGBTQ individuals. Why do you think parents might want to join PFLAG? How can it help them? How does it help their children?
2. One parent said that she was afraid of sharing with other people, but she instead got a lot of love and support. What kinds of positive things do you think you could say to a parent who told you their child was transgender?
3. One mother says she was afraid she had “done this to her child.” Why might a parent feel that way? What are some ways you are different from your parents that do not result from how they raised you?

**Lesson 6, Video #3:****It Gets Better with
Mormon Family and
Friends****Date Uploaded:** April 19, 2012**Length:** 6 minutes, 12 seconds

“[LGBTQ people] teach us, help us love, help us understand more about ourselves, about compassion. And when that happens, we change the world.”

Questions:

1. What do you know about the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the Mormon Church)? What are some assumptions you had about religious families and LGBTQ family members?
2. Why do you think a religious organization would make a video like this? Why do you think they chose only to speak as parents and relatives and not to show the LGBTQ family members?
3. Why do you think one mother says she was afraid it would reflect poorly on her parenting? What reasons do the other parents give for changing their views?
4. One parent says, “I don’t know what it’s like to be gay, but I know what it’s like to be alone.” What are other emotions LGBTQ children might feel that their parents might also share?



Lesson 6, Video #4:

It Gets Better Video: Jenni and Lisa 2015

Date Uploaded: April 19, 2012
Length: 3 minutes, 47 seconds

“The world is a very big place and we have this great chosen family that you are a part of.”

Questions:

1. Why do you think this video would be chosen for this session on family?
2. What does “chosen family” mean to you in this context?
3. Do you have a “chosen family?” Why or why not? Why do you think this concept is familiar within the LGBTQ community?

**Lesson 6, Video #5:****Feather Boa Fathers
— It Gets Better**

Date Uploaded: November 18, 2010
Length: 5 minutes, 42 seconds

“You can create any family you want to or need to.”

Questions:

1. Why do you think so many of these men felt they could not be fathers when they realized they were gay?
2. What kinds of activities or interactions, either between siblings or between parent and child, reminded you of your own sibling or parent interactions?
3. What are the reasons that people want to become parents? In your opinion, are any of these reasons specific to heterosexual people?



Lesson 6, Video #6:

It Gets Better: LGBTQ Family Edition from Canada

Date Uploaded: April 8, 2016

Length: 6 minutes, 19 seconds

“This changes nothing, but it also changes everything.”

Questions:

1. The Freesans talk about both accepting right away, and going on a journey. How could their story be both accepting and cautious?
2. How did the experiences of the Freesans differ from the stories we have heard about parents with more reservations? How did having other gay people in their family affect their coming out?
3. If you have siblings, what is important to you about having something in common with them? What is important about having differences from them?

**Lesson 6, Video #7:****Evelyn Cohen's Message to Parents: 'It Gets Better'****Date Uploaded:** October 11, 2013**Length:** 2 minutes, 55 seconds

“The only way to get rid of prejudice is to learn more about it. . .the important thing is you have to come to terms with it and you have to accept your child.”

Questions:

1. What struggles does Evelyn admit to having when Andy came out to her?
2. She says, “The only way to get rid of prejudice is to learn more about it.” What recommendations does she make for learning more? What additions would you make to the list?
3. How do you think you would react if a future child of yours told you they were LGBTQ? How do you think your parents might react to an imaginary sibling coming out as LGBTQ to your family? What might be hard at first? What questions do you think you or your parent would have?

For Further Reflection and Discussion

For Personal Reflection:

1. What does the word “family” mean to you? Is it defined by biology or by something else? Do we get to choose who is in our family?
2. How would you describe your family (using whatever definition you choose)? Think about aspects like communication, openness, affection, etc.
3. If someone in your family felt pressure not to be themselves, how would you approach this discomfort? One-on-one, or as a family unit? Why?
4. Define the terms “family of origin” and “family of choice.” (Feel free to look them up.) Are these groups mutually exclusive?

For Group Discussion:

1. Why do you think families are often the hardest people for LGBTQ people to come out to?
2. For some families, coming out causes stress and disharmony. For others, it is the beginning of a new level of intimacy and honesty. Are these things mutually exclusive? How might both responses be appropriate (or at least understandable) as families come to terms with coming out? Feel free to share examples from your own experience.
3. Just as individuals come out, so too must families, as the news of someone’s identity is disseminated to larger audiences of friends and extended family. How does this process affect the LGBTQ individual? How can families protect and honor their LGBTQ members as they “come out” as a queer family?
4. When families are unable to accept LGBTQ people, painful separation can occur. If LGBTQ people find themselves estranged from their families, what advice would you give them as they look for support? (Think about some of the definitions and aspects you described earlier. Where else might an LGBTQ person find these qualities?)

Activity

An Exercise in Empathy Building

OBJECTIVE: Students will be able to create comic strips to tell a story of characters sharing a difficult secret.

MATERIALS: Printer paper, writing utensil, lined paper, art supplies (optional)

PREPARATION: Each student will need one piece of printer paper, as well as a writing utensil.

DESCRIPTION: Students will build empathy around the idea of hiding truths from people close to them and investigate how to understand points of view and perspective. They will create a short comic either individually or in pairs telling a story of family members or close friends telling a difficult secret.

Instructions:

1. Say: *Imagine that you had something you felt you could not tell the people you think of as family, or maybe even recall silently a time you could not tell something to a member of the family.*
2. Say: *For the next few minutes, we are going to reflect silently, in writing, on the following questions (5 minutes):*
 - a. What is difficult about hiding things from our parents and family?
 - b. How did the lives of the people in the videos change after they were honest with their family?
 - c. What advice would you give to an LGBTQ person scared to come out to their family?
3. Ask for volunteers to share a few responses.
4. Say: *In the stories you saw many individuals reflect on the pain that hiding something from someone close to you can cause. For this activity, you will be creating a short comic story that will involve two people, one of which is hiding something from the other. You may choose a situation similar to the ones in the videos, a family member hiding their sexual or gender identity from someone else in their family. You could also choose a different situation. For example, you might choose:*
 - a. *A parent who has a new job in a different city and doesn't want to tell their children they have to move away from their friends*

- b.** A student who is nervous about their parent seeing their report card
- c.** A friend who is afraid to tell someone of an invitation to a party that their friend was not invited to
- d.** Another experience from your life

5. Say: *First, I am going to give you 5 minutes to brainstorm individually or in pairs. While brainstorming, make sure you are thinking about who your two characters are, what they will say, how the characters will react, and what resolution your characters might come to. In comic strips, characters usually share one thought or action per panel, so you will want to think about what to place in each panel on your sheet. The maximum number of panels on your sheet will be 8, so plan accordingly!*

6. Say: *Now, you have 15–20 minutes to create a comic strip. To create the frames for your comic strip, you may want to fold your paper into fourths, sixths, or eighths to create the individual panels of your comic strip. In comic strips, artists use different types of bubbles to show what a character is thinking or saying. (Draw or show a picture of cartoon speech or thought bubbles.) You should incorporate speech and thought bubbles into your comic strip as well.*

7. Give students time to draw and create their panels.

8. Have the students post their comics around the room and do a gallery walk. After they view the comic strips, have students give constructive feedback and/or ask questions of one another. You can prompt with the following questions:

- a.** How did you feel when creating the panel?
- b.** How did your comic end? Why did you choose that ending (happy, sad, no resolution, etc.)?

- c.** Do you think this is how this situation would resolve in real life? Why or why not?
- d.** What effect do you think this secret would have on these characters' relationship?
- e.** What are the benefits or downfalls of sharing a secret?
What are the benefits or downfalls of keeping a secret?

Additional Ideas for Engagement:

- 1.** One of the most urgent crises facing LGBTQ youth is the issue of homelessness amongst those who leave or are forced to separate from their families of origin. Research the issue of LGBTQ homelessness in your own area. (See the Resources section after this lesson, and look for ways to support these vulnerable individuals as they rebuild their lives.)
- 2.** For LGBTQ People: Think about those you consider your family (family of origin or family of choice). How open are you with them? Challenge yourself to have at least one conversation in which you tell a member of your family what they mean to you, and open yourself to them as authentically as you feel comfortable doing.
- 3.** For allies: Are there people in your family (family of origin or family of choice) that you feel could use some extra support? Challenge yourself to let a member of your family know what they mean to you, and articulate your unconditional love and support for that person.
- 4.** Search for a local PFLAG — Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays meeting and try to attend a session. There are people who want to give love and support to those who need it. And there are people who need yours!

Conclusion

Families take lots of different forms and mean very different things to different people. Within the LGBTQ community, family can be very complex because of our individual experiences in coming out and in living our authentic lives. For some, our families have been or are becoming more accepting, nurturing us as the people that they have always known and loved. For others, our families have become a painful element of our lives, with some or all of our family members rejecting this component of our identity. And for many from both groups, we have found our “chosen families,” members of the LGBTQ and ally communities that we rely on and turn to in the ways that we might have turned to our parents and siblings when we were younger.

As homework, encourage students to explore the PFLAG website to learn more about the ways in which LGBTQ allies, families, and friends are working to create a more inclusive and welcoming community for all people. PFLAG’s monthly series on Talking Inclusively is a great place to start if you are considering the ways in which you can increase conversation about inclusivity and diversity in your own community.

Resources for Study and Action

It Gets Better Project

Research shows that convincing young people that things can change for the better helps them avoid depression, assists with aggression, and improves general health.⁴ That's why the *It Gets Better Project* has a mission to communicate that *it gets better* to LGBTQ youth around the world, to inspire and empower through story. The over 60,000 *It Gets Better* videos collected, as well as the other resources and inspiring content the organization creates and shares, help in that effort. To learn more, or to share your story, join us at:

Website: www.itgetsbetter.org

Resource Center: www.itgetsbetter.org/ResourceCenter

Email: info@itgetsbetter.org

YouTube: www.youtube.com/itgetsbetter

Facebook: www.facebook.com/itgetsbetterproject

Twitter: twitter.com/ItGetsBetter_

Tumblr: itgetsbetterproject.tumblr.com_

Instagram: www.instagram.com/itgetsbetter

For Educators:

Campus Pride: <https://www.campuspride.org/>

Gender Spectrum: www.genderspectrum.org/

GLSEN: www.glsen.org

GSA Network: www.gsanetwork.org/

Trans Student Educational Resources (TSER):
www.transstudent.org

Welcoming Schools (from the Human Rights Campaign Foundation): www.welcomingschools.org

For Youth in Need of Support:

Crisis Text Line: www.crisistextline.org
Text to 741741

GLBT National Help Center and Hotline:
www.glbthotline.org
Hotline: 1-800-THE-GLNH (843-4564)
Youth Talkline: 1-800-246-PRIDE (7743)

National Runaway Safeline:
www.180orunaway.org
1-800-786-2929

Trans Lifeline:
www.translifeline.org
United States: 877-565-8860
Canada: 877-330-6366

Trevor Project:
www.thetrevorproject.org
Trevor Lifeline: 1-866-4-U-TREVOR (488-7386)

⁴ Miu, Adriana Sum and David Scott Yeager (2014). Preventing Symptoms of Depression by Teaching Adolescents That People Can Change: Effects of a Brief Incremental Theory of Personality Intervention at 9-Month Follow-Up. *Clinical Psychological Science*.

Glossary

Language is an extremely powerful tool. It allows us to generate ideas, share stories, and learn and grow from others. Whether spoken, signed, or written, all languages are constantly evolving, and, despite their imperfections, can help us better understand our world and communicate our perspective with others.

The Internet has played a tremendous role in the evolution of language by offering people the chance to connect with peers around the globe. This has been especially true for the LGBTQ community. Many young people today discover who they are online, and find positive words there to describe how they feel and identify. That can be a wonderful and empowering experience. Consider this quote from Lucian Clark in *Through Labels We Exist*, an article published on <https://genderterror.com/> in 2013:

“Labels are important. They allow us to not only understand the world around us, but ourselves. Many of us struggle with what labels to apply to ourselves. We cycle through them, try them on like shirts, and discard the ones that do not fit. Some of us try on many more labels, while others may be perfectly fine with those assigned to them through others. I mean, some of us do take longer to get ready, no?”

Throughout this guide, we hear from individuals whose stories are told using labels they've come to embrace and love. These can be found below. They are words that help listeners like you and me understand who someone is and how they wish to identify. Some of these terms are used universally by LGBTQ people, while others relate to the following concepts specifically:

GENDER EXPRESSION (GE). The external manifestations of gender, expressed through such things as names,

pronouns, clothing, haircuts, behavior, voice, body characteristics, and more.

GENDER IDENTITY (GI). One's internal, deeply held sense of gender. Some people identify completely with the gender they were assigned at birth (usually male or female), while others may identify with only a part of that gender, or not at all. Some people identify with another gender entirely. Unlike gender expression, gender identity is not visible to others.

SEX (S). At birth, infants are commonly assigned a sex. This is usually based on the appearance of their external anatomy, and is often confused with gender. However, a person's sex is actually a combination of bodily characteristics including chromosomes, hormones, internal and external reproductive organs, and secondary sex characteristics. As a result, there are many more sexes than just the binary male and female, just as there are many more genders than just male and female.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION (SO). The desire one has for emotional, romantic, and/or sexual relationships with others based on their gender expression, gender identity, and/or sex. Many people choose to label their sexual orientation, while others do not.

Please note that the following list is by no means comprehensive. These are simply the words referenced in this guide's lesson plans and *It Gets Better* videos specifically. There are many more words out there that represent the vast diversity of the LGBTQ community. For many, it's a living and evolving language. To learn more, check out such great resources as the GLAAD Media Reference Guide (10th Edition), or the Trans Student Educational Resources (TSER) website.

Ally (GE, GI, S, SO)

Noun. Someone who supports equal civil rights, gender equality, and LGBTQ social movements; advocates on behalf of others; and challenges fear and discrimination in all its forms.

Asexual, or ace (SO)

Adjective. Someone who experiences little or no sexual attraction, or who experiences attraction but doesn't feel the need to act out that attraction sexually. Many people who are asexual still identify with a specific sexual orientation.

Binary (GE, GI, S, SO)

Noun. The belief that such things as gender identity have only two distinct, opposite, and disconnected forms. In other words, they believe in the gender binary, that only male and female genders exist. As a rejection of this belief, many people embrace a non-binary gender identity (see *Gender Nonconforming*).

Bisexual, or bi (SO)

Adjective. Someone who is attracted to those of their same gender as well as to those of a different gender (for example, a woman who is attracted to both women and men). Some people use the word bisexual as an umbrella term to describe individuals that are attracted to more than one gender. In this way, the term is closely related to pansexual, or omnisexual, meaning someone who is attracted to people of any gender identity.

Butch, or masc (GE)

Adjective. Someone whose gender expression is masculine. Butch is sometimes used as a derogatory term for lesbians, but it can also be claimed as an affirmative identity label. In many communities of color in the United States, words like "stud" and "aggressive" are commonly used instead. Other gender expressions include **androgynous** (or androgyne, someone who presents as neither male or female, mixed, or neutral), **femme** (or fem, someone whose gender expression is feminine), and **stemme** (or stem, someone whose gender expression is both masculine and feminine).

Cisgender, or cis (GI)

Adjective. A person whose gender identity matches the gender they were assigned at birth.

Coming Out (GE, GI, S, SO)

Verb, noun. The process through which a person accepts their sexual orientation and/or gender identity as part of their overall identity. For many, this involves sharing that identity with others, which makes it more of a lifetime process rather than just a one-time experience.

Crossdresser (GE)

Noun. Someone who wears clothes associated with a different gender. This activity is a form of gender expression, and is not always done for entertainment purposes. Many crossdressers may not wish to present as a different gender all of the time. (NOTE: Avoid using the term "transvestite.")

Drag (GE)

Noun, adjective. The act of presenting as a different gender, usually for the purpose of entertainment (i.e. drag kings and queens). Many people who do drag may not wish to present as a different gender all of the time.

Gay (SO)

Adjective. Someone who is attracted to those of their same gender. This is often used as an umbrella term, but is used more specifically to describe men who are attracted to men. (NOTE: Avoid using the term “homosexual.” Because of the clinical history of the word, many feel that the term suggests that gay people are somehow diseased or psychologically/ emotionally disordered.)

Gender Affirmation Surgery (GE)

Noun. Medical procedures that some individuals elect to undergo to change their physical appearance to more closely resemble how they view their gender identity. (NOTE: Avoid saying inaccurate phrases such as “sex change,” “gender reassignment surgery,” or “pre- or post-operative,” and, in general, avoid overemphasizing surgery when discussing transgender people or the process of transition.)

Gender Nonconforming (GE, GI)

Adjective. Someone whose gender identity and/or gender expression does not conform to the cultural or social expectations of gender, particularly in relation to male or female. This can be an umbrella term for many identities including, but not limited to:

Agender (or neutrois, gender neutral, or genderless) — someone who has little or no personal connection with gender.

Bigender — someone who identifies with both male and female genders, or even a third gender.

Genderfluid — someone whose gender identity and/or expression varies over time.

Genderqueer (or third gender) — someone whose gender identity and/or expression falls between or outside of male and female.

Intergender — someone whose identity is between genders and/or a combination of gender identities and expressions.

Pangender — someone whose identity is comprised of all or many gender identities and expressions.

Intersectionality (GE, GI, S, SO)

Noun. The idea that multiple identities intersect to create a whole that is different from its distinct parts. To understand someone, it is important to acknowledge that each of their identities is important and inextricably linked with all of the others. These can include identities related to gender, race, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, religion, age, mental and/or physical ability, and more.

Intersex (S)

Adjective. Someone who, due to a variety of factors, has reproductive or sexual anatomy that does not seem to fit the typical definitions for the female or male sex. Some people who are intersex may identify with the gender assigned to them at birth, while many others do not.

Lesbian (SO)

Adjective, noun. A woman who is attracted to other women. Some lesbians prefer to identify as gay women.

LGBT+ (GE, GI, S, SO)

Adjective. The acronym for “lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender” (sometimes seen as “GLBT”). The plus sign represents the fact that many communities choose to expand the acronym to include other identities. For example, while it is common in the United States to see “LGBT” or “LGBTQ” (for queer), it is more common to see “LGBTI” (for intersex) in Europe.

Pride (GE, GI, S, SO)

Noun. The celebration of LGBTQ identities, and of the global LGBTQ community’s resistance against discrimination and violence. Pride events are celebrated in many countries around the world, usually during the month of June to commemorate the Stonewall Riots that began in New York City in June 1969, a pivotal moment in the modern LGBTQ movement.

Queer (GE, GI, S, SO)

Adjective. In a very basic sense, anyone who is not heterosexual and/or cisgender. In the past, queer was a negative or pejorative term for people who are gay, and thus it is sometimes disliked. But the term is increasingly being used to describe all identities and politics that go against normative beliefs. As such, the term is valued by many LGBTQ people for its defiance and by others who find it to be an appropriate term to describe their more fluid identities.

Questioning (GI, GE, SO)

Noun, verb. A time in many people’s lives when they question or experiment with their gender expression, gender identity, and/or sexual orientation. This experience is unique to everyone; for some, it can last a lifetime or be repeated many times over the course of a lifetime.

Straight, or heterosexual (SO)

Adjective. A word to describe women who are attracted to men and men who are attracted to women. This is not exclusive to those who are cisgender. For example, some transgender men identify as straight because they are attracted to women.

They/Them/Their (GE)

Pronouns. One of many sets of gender-neutral singular pronouns in English that can be used as an alternative to he/him/his or she/her/hers. Usage of this particular set is becoming more and more prevalent, particularly within the LGBTQ community.

Transgender, or trans (GI)

Adjective. Someone whose gender identity differs from the one that was assigned to them at birth. Many transgender people identify as either male or female, while others may see transgender as an umbrella term and identify as gender nonconforming or queer. How transgender people choose to express their gender is individualistic, as is their transition. (NOTE: Avoid using transgender as a noun, as in “a transgender,” or with an extraneous -ed on the end, as in “transgendered.”)

Transsexual (GI)

Adjective. Someone who has undergone, or wishes to undergo, gender affirmation surgery. (NOTE: This is an older term that originated in the medical and psychological communities. Many transgender people do not identify as transsexual, although the term is preferred by some.)

Transition (GE)

Noun. The process through which some transgender people change their gender expression to more closely resemble how they view their gender identity. This can include personal, medical, and legal steps, such as using a different name and pronouns; dressing differently; changing one’s name and/or sex on legal documents; hormone therapy; or gender affirmation surgery. Some transgender people may not choose to make these changes or may only make a few. The experience is an individual one; there is no right or wrong way to transition.



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