



Top 7 Things to Unlearn about LGBTQ+ People

1. “He talks gay, she dresses like a man, they look trans” – A person’s LGBTQ+ identity is self-determined and is not based on adherence to gender or sexuality stereotypes/norms.
2. “There must be something mentally wrong with them. They must have been abused. They must not have had a father/mother figure.” – an LGBTQ+ identify being the result of a mental trauma has been denounced by multiple health organizations (incl. American Physiological Association). Folks don’t become gay, but they do become traumatized when they aren’t given permission or space to be their queer selves.
3. “You’ll get AIDS, bisexual men have HIV” - HIV/AIDS is *not* an LGBTQ+ disease, it is an equal opportunity disease. HIV in the 80’s sparked as a result of unprotected sex, little knowledge about the disease, and sharing of needles amongst people of all sexualities.
4. “You just haven’t had sex with me yet. She just hasn’t met the right man yet” – A person’s sexual identity is not usually determined by a specific sexual encounter. One does not need to “try it” to be valid in their sexual identity.
5. “If we accept LGBTQ+ people, than anything, like pedophilia, will be ok. Gay people just want everyone to be gay.” - The LGBTQ+ community and those identified as pedophiles are not connected – there are numerous studies that prove this. Furthermore, efforts to bring awareness and acceptance to the LGBTQ+ experience have prompted more people to come out than ever before. However, this should not be viewed as turning heterosexuals gay, but rather allowing those who would hide their sexuality to feel more safe and secure to come out. Saying “gay people just want everyone to be gay” sounds like a straight person just wanting everyone to be straight.
6. “It’s cool to be gay now. Being gay means you’re trendy or want extra rights.” Things are *not* equal for LGBTQ people in the United States, and even though it is “getting better,” there is still a long way to go before LGBTQ people have the same rights, protections, and dignity as their straight/cisgender peers.
7. “Why are all these strong men becoming gay? You can’t be a “real woman” and be a lesbian.” One’s physical, emotional, spiritual, or psychological strength is independent of their sexual identity. A person does not become weaker or less valuable by recognizing themselves as being gay/queer. The belief that femininity lessens someone’s manhood is both sexist and homophobic, and perpetuating this belief causes life-long harm.

Tips to being an Ally

- **An ally 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year** -- being an ally isn't something you can turn on and off when it's convenient or comfortable for you. If you take on the ally mantle, it means you're signing up to be an ally at all times (in grocery stores, at work, at family gatherings, in the bathroom, etc). Nothing will destroy your ally credibility like someone seeing you take off your ally cap (e.g., tossing around, or consenting to, homophobic language when you think "no LGBTQ people are around").
- **Willing to ask questions, admit I'm wrong, and keep learning** – Safer Spaces workshops are a great time to do this, but an ally's learning isn't limited to a few hour experience. Do your best to stay current on events, learn to be comfortable admitting you don't know something, or that you're wrong, and never stop asking questions!
- **An amplifier for the voices of LGBTQ people, but not speak on their behalf** -- no one person can speak for an entire group of people, so try your best not to. Use phrases like "in many cases" or "a lot of the time" instead of "all" or "every ___ person." Remember, only the sith deal in absolutes. A great saying to keep in mind is that a good ally is like a really expensive sound system: they amplify the voices of marginalized people *without distorting them*.
- **Understanding when LGBTQ-identified individuals aren't comfortable with me** -- as an ally, you should do your best to support queer spaces and events, but know that you shouldn't feel entitled to be there, or to be *every* queer-identified person's ally. Some people have had terrible experiences with straight/cis people, so respect that and be understanding.
- **Conscious of my own privilege, prejudice, and dispositions** -- guess what, there's a *really good* chance you have a bit of homophobic or transphobic-ness packed down inside you somewhere. That's normal (it's how you were socialized). Make sure you're cognizant of these things, and do your best to address and unpack them over time, so they are less likely to inadvertently color your experiences or negatively influence your interactions with members of certain groups.

Coming Out Support Tips

- 1. Don't say "I've always known" or "why didn't you come out to me sooner?"** – If someone is coming out to you, it means they trust you with new and sensitive information. This is likely a big deal for them, even if it's something you've suspected for a long time.
- 2. Do ask encouraging questions, inquire --** Ask them how they are doing, if they have any crushes, if they want you to tell other people or keep it to yourself. Find out what they need or what from you right then, and why they are coming out to you now.
- 3. Listen, be patient, and don't push --** If they aren't ready to tell you much more, give them time. If they don't want to tell other people, don't push them to. Every person's coming out experiences are different (due in part to the support/lack of support from family, friends, etc), so respect their wishes and comfort.

While it is vital that we understand the harsh realities of coming out for many individuals, it is also important to know that for several people this is not their reality. Many experience loving parents, friends, employers and more. However, it is important to know that no matter who the individual is and what their particular situation in life, coming out can be difficult, scary, and uncomfortable -- no matter how supportive individuals are around them. And remember that many individuals have to evaluate on a daily basis the repercussions that coming out could have on their life.

Sources include The Safe Zone Project