

BOX 3.38 IMPERFECT, BUT HOME

I must admit, many gay friends of mine regard it as peculiar, if not worse, that I would belong to a [Catholic church] that teaches me that my love is no more than a lifestyle. I reply to critics that the church's treasury of the sacraments is a great consolation to me.

Richard Rodriguez, "My Sad Gay Church," *Salon.com*, www.salon.com (June 14, 2002).

A Miami-raised Cuban, [Grisel] Rodriguez, 49, cried living in Allentown, Pa., years ago but missed Miami's Hispanic culture. "They may be homophobic, but they're my homophobes!"

Andrea Elliott, "Living a Dual Life," *Miami Herald* (June 11, 2002).

Question 34: *Do multiple minority students have special counseling needs?*

They have all the concerns of other gay and lesbian adolescents and then additional ones related to their other minority identities. As described in chapter 2, coming out can threaten their established links to the ethnic, racial, class, or religious groups where they have been taught to resist stigma and oppression. The

BOX 3.39 REMINDERS TO FAMILIES ABOUT THEIR SEXUAL MINORITY CHILDREN

- You may need time to grieve—but not forever.
- Homosexuality is nobody's fault.
- Your child's coming out is not an act of betrayal.
- Don't blame his or her sexuality for any of your child's failings.
- Concern for your child's safety is warranted, but think about whether some of your worry might be about yourself.
- Educate yourself about sexual orientation.
- Your child has not been recruited or forced into homosexuality by anyone.
- Honor and celebrate your gay child's relationships as you would those of any other child.
- There are many gay-affirming, religious, teachings and accepting churches.
- Look forward to your child's productive and happy future.

BOX 3.40 DOUBLE JEOPARDY

A. Charlene Leach, [of] the National Youth Advocacy Coalition . . . says . . . that black and Latino families are often less accepting of a teenager's homosexuality than white families. Gay youth of color also face dual hostility from the outside community—for being gay and for being a minority. "What is typically viewed as being in the closet for [white gay kids] doesn't have the same connotation for gay youth of color. . . . A lot of times they won't come out because of safety and survival. . . . The impact is definitely greater for youth of color."

Laura Lang, "Below the Gaydar," *Washington [D.C.] City Paper*, May 19, 2000.

family, community, church, and sometimes the school as well have provided positive reinforcement for these identities but rarely for a homosexual one.

In the mind of a multiple minority adolescent, coming out as gay means casting oneself into a gay environment that could be as oppressive as the majority world has already been. Where would one's anchor be then? Multiple minority adolescents may be frustrated and angry to find that they cannot feel entirely safe in either community. The risks are great for psychological isolation and its typical consequences: depression, substance abuse, and so on. (See box 3.40.)

The best counseling strategy is to demonstrate that the gay identities are not incompatible with multiple minority ones. If an adolescent is caught up in competing loyalties—the "which are you first?" question—they should be assured that the question is unfair. These young people need role models, affinity groups, readings, films, and other materials to make a convincing case for successful identity integration. (See appendix B.) In some communities these resources are plentiful and accessible. In others it will take perseverance to find them. Sometimes a few books, magazines, or websites are all that can be provided; yet they may still be lifelines.

These students need support dealing with all their oppressions, including heterosexism. They cannot wait to be psychically whole, postponing coming out until racial, ethnic, class, and religious prejudices have been vanquished. The counseling aim is to achieve congruence between sexual identity and the rest of the self. (See box 3.41.)

Immigrant youth may also have particular counseling needs. They may be discovering their homosexual desires for the first time or they may be finding new meanings and words for feelings that were interpreted differently in their native cultures. The sexual repertoire that men particularly are allowed in other parts of the world is replaced here by a rigid labeling system that could estrange them not only from their established sense of themselves but also from their families

BOX 3.41 MULTIPLE MINORITY GAY IDENTITY INTEGRATION

- Denial of Conflict—minimizing both race and sexuality as sources of stress.
- Bisexual versus Gay/Lesbian—using bisexual label to retain affiliation with the ethnic/racial group.
- Conflicts in Allegiances—anxiety over prioritizing memberships
- Establishing Priorities in Allegiance—during which ethnicity/race prevails and resentment arises from rejection by the homosexual community
- Integrating the Various Communities—commitment grows toward developing a wholly accommodating identity, even with continuing limitations

Source: Edward S. Morales, "Third World Gays and Lesbians: A Process of Multiple Identities" (paper presented at the 91st Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association, Anaheim, Calif., August 1983).

and other cultural supports. (See box 3.42.) Girls from patriarchal cultures and religions would likely need help in both asserting their sexual autonomy and resolving lesbian identity issues. If these young people feel pressured to come out, they might turn their distress into resentment toward their counselors, as might their families.

On the other hand, those who have dealt successfully with one stigmatized identity may have an advantage in negotiating another. Gay and lesbian minority youth should be counseled in adapting the skills they learned to combat racism and other forms of bigotry to meet the challenges of homophobia.

BOX 3.42 DIFFERENTLY QUEER

While coming to the States might provide us with the opportunities to come out, that coming out is always compromised by the fact that we are negotiating our queerness in a larger social world which, due to racism and imperialism, does not recognize or speak to our own ways of being queer.

Charidan Reddy and David Sved, "I Left My Country for This? Asian We're Here" (San Francisco, January 11, 2002).

Question 35: How should counselors deal with the families of multiple minority and immigrant gay youth?

Counselors should talk with the student about his or her family's cultural history, power dynamics, and experience with oppression. What are their ideas about procreation, religious observance, gender, and sexuality? What words do they use to describe sexuality and sexual identity? How do they feel about popular culture, the gender system, and sexual expression in their adopted country? Some parents might consider a homosexual identity to be a Western, North American, white, incomprehensible, inconceivable, or sinful concept. They may accuse their children of betrayal and threaten to disown them if they come out as gay.

Counselors might encounter barriers characteristic of particular minority populations. Chinese families, for example, might not discuss painful issues, even among themselves. Asian youth might use their successes to divert their families' attention away from sexuality and expectations of marriage. In Latin cultures the customs both of face-saving and indirectness in conflict management work against coming out explicitly, and quiet toleration may signal denial more than acceptance. Chicanas' special devotion to their mothers might also keep them silent.

These particulars can be elusive to those who are not members of the culture. Counselors can recruit minority colleagues, parents, or community-based psychologists or social workers who are "culturally competent" to assist in family counseling. (See box 3.43.)

Resources developed for multiple minority families are useful (see appendix C) but sometimes fail. The counselor's reassurances about the integration of homosexuality with other identities may be rejected. Role models may evaporate as students conclude that whatever worked for these paragons would never persuade

BOX 3.43 DIFFERENT ROOTS—NEW HOPE

For Those We Love [is the first support group for parents of GLBT youth] to target African Americans. "Because of our culture, and the way we're grounded, some of us don't want to share our feelings with [nonblack] people," founder William Beale said. [Pamela Birchett, of the Sexual Minority Youth Assistance League] who is black, said she has found that socioeconomic status—perhaps more than race—signals whether a family will seek help from a support group. Still, she senses an increasing openness to support groups.

Steven Gray, "Finding Strength in Shared Circumstance," New Group, *Journaling Parents of Black Gays*, Washington Post, May 28, 1999.

BOX 3.44 UNACCEPTABLE CONDITIONS

- coming back to a family or community that offers pity or second-class status
- accusations that they have been corrupted by American or homosexual culture
- proffering of cures, including heterosexual match-making or prayer
- having to lead a double life (silence in the minority community even in the face of blatant homophobia and openness in the gay/lesbian community)
- conforming to norms of gender role and gender expression
- membership in a church that loves you but not who you are

their parents. And they might be right. Coming out can indeed estrange them from their families, at least for a time. Still, there is no need to lose all connection to their cultural heritage. There are pockets of acceptance all over the world and in all faith traditions. (See appendix A.)

It may be impossible to reintegrate at home without conflict, misery, and unacceptable terms. (See box 3.44.) Families might demand the kinds of compromises that cause sexual minority sons and daughters long-term distress. GLBT people may be unable to let go of expectations for parental and community acceptance that will never come. Counseling can give them the capacity to turn away from repeated disappointment and to find love in new families, faiths, and communities.

Question 36: What special risks do multiple minority youth encounter in the gay community?

Regrettably, they face the same twin oppressions of stereotyping and prejudice that they find elsewhere. Offenses range from outright racism or religious bigotry to marginalization in the political, social, and cultural arenas of the gay community.

Not all white Western homosexuals understand or acknowledge multiple minority perspectives on the world. In their zeal to fight heterosexism, they sometimes seem oblivious to the other oppressions that many gays and lesbians face. They act as if they expect multiple minorities to disengage from their matrix of identity issues just to be gay in the gay community, and then deal with other concerns by themselves and on their own time.

Outreach and inclusion must go beyond quotas, tokenism, and good intentions to comprehensive multicultural education and the cultivation of empathy. Teachers and counselors should not rely only on multiple minorities to

instruct everyone else on the interconnectedness of oppressions and the invisibility for each individual of racial, ethnic, gender, class, ability, and religious identities.

Relationship issues between different race/ethnicity couples can also be problematic for people of any sexuality. Being fetishized, that is, loved as an exotic object rather than as a full human being, can be disturbing, particularly in the context of societal oppression. A redhead might not object to a partner's passion for red hair, yet a black person could be troubled by his or her lover's excitement over dark skin. Conversely, some minority people are drawn to their physical "opposites" because of internalized racist standards of beauty.

Sometimes opposites attract and there's the end. Yet the experiences of adults in mixed relationships suggest that these issues do come up. Young people too can be concerned about being objectified or about never being interested in partners like themselves. If they cannot see their own beauty and the beauty of the "other" with equally loving eyes, they are more likely to use and be used.

Multiple minorities' cultural practices could also contribute to relationship difficulties. Young men and women from cultures that promote male dominance and rigid gender roles, for example, might have difficulties with power and role in their same gender relationships. They need to cultivate their capacity to be flexible, compromise, share, and reverse roles comfortably.

Question 37: Do any of these concerns relate to the experience of young people with disabilities?

Deaf, visually impaired, physically handicapped, and learning disabled adolescents constitute comparatively few of the glbt youth population and are often omitted from consideration. But when they are treated as if their psychosocial and sexual identity development were ancillary considerations compared to their other needs, they are poorly served.

Their experience is indeed analogous to that of other multiple-minority glbt students. They face similar challenges in integrating sexual orientation with the rest of their identity constructs and in finding their place in the different communities of their lives. Although they may encounter no distinctive kind of homophobia in their disability community, it is still likely to be there in its generic form. They also face prejudice, disregard, condescension, and being fetishized in the gay community.

Question 38: How should counselors support transsexual youth?

Counselors should approach these young people with the same respect and positive attitude they bring to their interactions with glb students. Some "trans" youth

are exploring their gender identity and expression the way others try on different sexuality labels. Some are minstrelizing as a defense against harassment or as a consequence of internalized homophobia. Although the vicious murders of transgender teens Fred Martinez in Colorado in 2001 and Gwen Araujo in 2002 in California suggest otherwise, some trans youth feel that they will be less vulnerable to attack or less blameworthy for their desires if they just switch genders. Others are as sure of their internal gender, even at an early age, as anyone can ever be.

Good counseling can help them work through these issues. There should be no objection, if, after thoughtful self-examination, a young person wants to present as his or her nonbiological gender and be treated as such for the long term. When counselors remain skeptical they should examine the origins of their discomfort. Gay or straight, are they too deeply wedded to immutable gender categories?

A more justifiably troubling issue is gender reassignment by medical means. What level of transition is appropriate for a minor? Drug treatments and surgery

BOX 3.46 MORE LIKE A HEART TRANSPLANT THAN A NOSE JOB

"I didn't transition because I think one must have a male body to do certain things or behave in certain ways. I did it because I was miserable having a female body and I'm so much happier having a masculine body. The desire to have a differently sexed body is the essence of being transsexual. It is a very immediate somatic, physical thing. It is the difference between living with a degree of unhappiness and misery. I wouldn't wish on anybody and I feel good."

Shannon Minter in E. J. Griffin, *My Trans Problem*, *Village Voice*, June 20, 2001

are serious steps, requiring adult permission. Only specially trained psychologists and doctors are qualified to help a trans person of any age with these decisions. One question, however, is salient, even for the layperson: why would trans people feel that in order to be male or female, they must have the external biology of a man or a woman? In their disruption of the "naturalness" of gender, can't they also disrupt the attribution of particular gender qualities to specific biological bodies? When they feel male or female on the inside and want to change their lives, what dictates that they can't be males with vaginas or females with penises?

Transsexuals who undergo reassignment surgery give credence to conventional gender categories based on physical appearance, but so do cross-dressers, for that matter. It's just that surgery and hormone treatments are more hazardous to one's health than fitting into a size 10 pump.

In the end, why should people have to define as either male or female at all? Gender, policed with a vengeance, is ultimately in the mind. Ideally, might it not be better to support trans youth in dismantling gender categories—in mixing and matching accessories—rather than in radically altering their bodies? (See box 3.45.) On the other hand, theory must ultimately defer to individual desire and autonomy. After affirmative counseling and at an age of informed and mature judgment, the trans person's wishes are paramount. (See box 3.46.)

(For further reading, see appendix R.)

BOX 3.45 CAVEATS AND COMPROMISE

As more young transsexuals push to begin transitioning at a younger age, the social workers and medical providers who work with them are confronting a new frontier in gender ethics. "Should we make them wait as long as possible to be sure their decisions are not simply adolescent rebellion? Or make them at their word and let them begin hormones during puberty? Every day I feel torn between wanting to empower my patients and wanting to be sure not to harm them," says Jayne Jordan for the Callen-Lorde Center's transgender medicine program.

Maria Russo, "Teen Transsexuals," *Salon.com*, www.salon.com (August 28, 1999)

While one in 30,000 men and one in 100,000 women eventually initiate treatment for sex-change operations, even more say they are just as happy to be neither male nor female. At the University of Minnesota's Program in Human Sexuality, administrators now routinely admit patients who take only half the journey from one sex to the other, choosing hormones without surgery or surgery without hormones. "We see there's a lot more complexity to the world," [the associate director] says.

David France, "An Inconvenient Woman," *New York Times Magazine*, May 28, 2000