

### BOX 1.13 INTERNALIZED HOMOPHOBIA CAN ALSO BE DEADLY

A teenager, accused of bearing to death his friend told detectives he killed the boy because the two were involved in a homosexual relationship. Jon "Paul" Marsh, 17, is charged with [the] killing of Nathan Mayoral, 14. Marsh said he considered himself an "abomination." "I didn't want the relationship we had, and I just couldn't. I just couldn't be his friend." Marsh said the relationship was consensual and that he started hating himself because of it. He said he beat Mayoral with a ceramic plant saucer. Marsh said he also grabbed Mayoral's head and banged it on the ground several times. Then, he said, he stood on Mayoral's neck and beat his head with a hammer.

His "Teacher," Suspect in Killing, Talk of Gay Relationship, *Houston Chronicle* (July 3, 2008)

and I must stop being gay," versus the affirming, even defiant, "The solution to my pain is to eradicate heterosexism."

(For further reading, see appendix R.)

## 2

# Homosexualities

*Question 1: How does a gay, lesbian, or bisexual young person come to his or her identity?*

Researchers like Eli Coleman, V. C. Cass, and Richard Trolden propose a number of developmental models to explain how a person reaches a gay, lesbian, or bisexual identification. They represent a blend of psychological stages and outward affiliation. Although the various models differ in minor detail, they all feature initial ambiguity, frequent questioning, imbalance, and information seeking as well as increasing comfort. (See box 2.1)

Because of stigma the process often involves shame, guilt, and avoidance. Sadly, the help that people from other oppressed groups usually have to support their identity development—family love, nearby community, adult role models, and cultural history—are too often absent for sexual minority youth.

*Question 2: Have these models of identity development been proven?*

As helpful as they are for outlining the sequence and nature of homosexual identity acquisition, no one moves along so unambiguously as these models suggest. First, they may be too linear, even if sequences are sometimes clear in individual cases. (See box 2.2.) There are usually fits, starts, and slippage.

Second, these developmental models give the impression that the homosexual orientation is an inner potential, just waiting for the right circumstances to emerge—and that the whole process has a final goal. We might wrongly conclude that an end-stage "mature" identity was uniform within each classification: gay men, lesbians, bisexual males, and bisexual females.

### BOX 2.1 STAGES OF HOMOSEXUAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

1. Pre-Sexuality  
Preadolescent nonsexual feelings of difference and marginality, often but not always, involving gender role.
2. Identity Questioning  
Ambiguous, repressed, sexualized same-gender feelings and/or activities. Avoidance of stigmatized label.
3. Coming Out  
Tolerance, then acceptance of identity through contact with gay/lesbian individuals and culture. Exploration of sexual possibilities and first erotic relationships. Careful, selective self-disclosure outside gay/lesbian community.
4. Pride  
Integration of sexuality into self. Capacity for love relationships. Wider self-disclosure and better stigma management.
5. Post-Sexuality  
A diminishment of centrality of homosexuality in self-concept and social relations.

Eric Coleman, "Developmental Stages of the Coming Out Process," in William Paul et al., *Homosexuality: Social, Psychological and Biological Issues* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1982); V.G. Cass, "Homosexual Identity Formation: Testing a Theoretical Model," *Journal of Sex Research* 20 (1983): 143-67; Richard R. Tolden, "The Formation of Homosexual Identities," in Gilbert Herdt, ed., *Gay and Lesbian Youth* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 1989).

#### Question 3: Is there a better way to think about homosexual identity development?

Yes. Sexuality identity development could be a lifelong process without a final stage. The "human development model" proposes that sexual interests are not a simple fixed "status" but are the result of a multidimensional, ongoing, interactive process. Culture, social norms, physical surroundings and interactions, and biology all affect one's sexuality over time. People come to and go from homosexual feelings, behavior, and identity when outer circumstances and inner readiness coincide.

This perspective recognizes that people arrive at their sexualities via their singular constitutions and unique life experiences. It also acknowledges that choice plays a role in recognizing and pursuing one's inclinations, declaring one's sexuality identity, or affiliating with a sexuality community.

### BOX 2.2 DEFINITIVE STAGES 2, 3, 4

We had to have the courage to say, oh my God, there are people out there who are like that. What if I'm like that? You start questioning it. And then you know for sure—you feel it. It's attraction. Just like how straight people know I like this boy or I like this girl. You know it. You know yourself. . . . Until I dated some girl at school, and that's when they started getting a notion, that's when they started knowing I started being open with it more. Me and Daniel, we even made a necklace that says "Queer" and we used to wear it at school. Everybody would just laugh about it or look at it like, you know, wow, they're really open with it. That put them in assurance, that you don't have to be scared of us because we're not scared of you.

Calisse, in Theresa Walker, "Out in the Open" [Interview with four gay teens]. *Orange County Register*, May 13, 2002.

#### Question 4: Isn't this model just theoretical?

We need to study individuals over a lifetime. Complete sexuality histories across cultures will yield the details about how people travel their affectional and erotic paths and how they make sense of themselves as they do. It is of course impossible to determine the real scope of anyone's sexuality potential as long as homophobia remains a factor in his or her self-admissions, sexual decisions, and public presentation.

#### Question 5: If sexuality is so flexible and if choice plays a role, can people really choose not to be homosexual?

All sexualities are chosen and fluidity can go both ways. Everyone should be freed from the restraints that impede their full sexual expression. The answer to the question, "Why did you decide to be gay?" could be "When did you decide to be inflexibly heterosexual?" (See box 2.3.)

#### Question 6: How important are biology and environment in determining sexual orientation?

Although this question could mean, "What makes some people gay and others straight?" most folks are only interested in why some people are gay. The heterosexual norm usually remains an unexamined given.

### BOX 2.3 I AM WHAT I AM—FOR NOW

[I]t seems that something different is emerging on the street these days. . . . It is composed of . . . ordinary women and men of all varieties who sleep with, fall in love with, live with and break up with both women and men over the course of their lives. . . . This is not a movement, certainly not an identity. . . . If pushed, some of these people, sighing, will call themselves bisexual or queer, but only as a political convenience, shorthand for "not straight."

Stacey D'Erasmio, "Has Sexual Identity Outlived Its Usefulness?" *New York Times*, October 14, 2001

[I]t's more common for today's young GLBT people to express and accept fluid gender and sexual identities. . . . On one hand, there's a push for GLBT young people to come out at earlier ages. [Esther D. Rothblum, Ph.D.] notes; on the other, more young people are pausing indefinitely in what she calls the "lingering" category.

Tori DeAngeli, "A New Generation of Issues for GLBT Clients," *Monitor On Psychology* 33, no. 2, [www.apa.org/monitor/feb02/generation.htm](http://www.apa.org/monitor/feb02/generation.htm) (February 2002)

Some search for a cause in order to change or prevent homosexuality. Others claim there will be less homophobia if homosexuality is proven to be biological, that is, not a choice, but a fate. Of course bigots who think homosexuality is biological could still want to suppress it. Nor is it clear why same-gender behavior in other animal species (e.g., swans, Japanese macaques, and fruit flies) should be relevant to the discussion.

So-called scientific reports on homosexual causation have a large audience today because of the mass media's fascination with the question. (See box 2.4.) Yet there is little questioning of the heterosexist bias that may influence this research.

We can probably safely conclude from recent studies that a variety of factors, both biological and environmental—nature and nurture—contribute to one's sexual orientation at a given time in one's life. It is also possible that male homosexuality entails different combinations of factors than lesbianism does.

*Question 7: Do gender nonconforming boys and girls become gay adults?*

Some retrospective studies have tried to "prove" that childhood effeminacy precedes male homosexuality. But when answering researchers' questions, adult

### BOX 2.4 IS IT GENETIC? . . . A SHOW OF HANDS AND OTHER PARTS

Homosexual men and women are more likely to be left-handed than their heterosexual counterparts. . . . Canadian researchers said . . .

"Homosexuals More Likely to Be Left-Handed, Study," *Reuters*, July 6, 2000

Researchers . . . say the relative lengths of the forefinger and the fourth finger can provide a pointer to sexual orientation.

AFP, "Fingers Point to Sexuality," *The Age* [Australia], March 29, 2000

[Two professors] have documented differences in brain response of homosexuals and heterosexuals to sound.

Ben Wear, "UT Research Backs the Nature Theory of Homosexuality," *Austin American-Statesman*, July 14, 2000

Stiff homosexual organs are one-third of an inch longer, claims an article titled "The Relation between Sexual Orientation and Penis Size."

Hank Hyena, "Research Claims Erect Gay Penises Are Bigger," *Salon.com*, [www.salon.com](http://www.salon.com) (November 4, 1999)

gay men may merely be more open to recalling their early gender nonconformity than heterosexuals are. And although nearly half of gay men remember not fitting in with other boys, most "sissies" do not become gay men. The most reliable predictor for boys seems to be the intensity and persistence of their nonconformity. (See box 2.5.)

### BOX 2.5 SISSIES

For the cross-dressing toddler in Toronto and other boys who show pervasive and persistently effeminate behavior, the odds of being gay lie at about 75% according to [psychologist] Michael Bailey. . . . That is a probability of homosexuality 20 times as high as that in the broad population of boys. . . . Among girls, this so-called gender-atypical behavior also is a good predictor of later lesbianism, though the pattern is weaker.

Melissa Healy, "Pieces of the Puzzle," *Los Angeles Times*, May 21, 2001

Tomboy violations of gender norms do not correlate well with adult lesbian identity.

**Question 8:** *What is transgendered?*

Usually by age three, people have a sense of what their gender is. Their gender identity is probably a product of both biology and socialization. Occasionally individuals develop gender identities that do not match their biological sex in a conventional sense. (Some were hermaphroditic, now called "intersexed," at birth and were surgically assigned a sex.) A "transgendered" person often considers himself or herself as a male or female trapped in the body of the "opposite" gender. Sometimes they feel as if they are differently gendered, yet neither male nor female.

Transgendered people may choose to express their gender through verbal self-representation, dress, and deportment alone. Or they might pursue drug therapies or gender reassignment surgery to become transsexual.

**Question 9:** *What is "coming out"?*

Coming out consists of affirming one's own homosexuality, making contact with the gay/lesbian community, and acknowledging oneself as gay/lesbian/bisexual to others. Coming out publicly increases personal integrity, decreases feelings of isolation, helps identity integration, and increases intimacy in relationships. Because people are usually assumed to be heterosexual, coming out to others can be a life-long task.

Coming out completely defies the notion that only heterosexuality is natural and good. Still, ridding oneself of internalized guilt and shame can go on into adulthood.

**Question 10:** *At what age do people come out?*

Many boys and girls experience same-gender desire and fantasy between the ages of seven and twelve and come out, at least to themselves, in their mid-teens. A drop in the mean age of "self-awareness" from nearly twenty in 1979 to about thirteen in 1998 may have been caused by the increased public visibility of homosexuality. (See box 2.6.) Years ago, young people had less opportunity and positive incentive to give a name to and make sense of their same-gender feelings.

Those who are identifiably gender nonconforming and have no heterosexual experience may come out earlier and go through the process faster. Those who

**BOX 2.6 UP AND OUT EARLY**

On the last day of seventh grade, Dave Grossman mounted some cardboard boxes down the street from his junior high school and held a one-boy rally. "I'm sick of pretending," he announced into a cheap loudspeaker "I'm gay." In fourth grade, he says, "I came to my senses. I was just staring benignly at the boy across from me." At 11, Dave found online chat rooms and located the gay bulletin board in short order. At 12, he told his parents. "His mother responded, 'Wow, I don't even know you had a sexuality!'"

Libby Copeland, *Out of the Closet, But Not Out of Middle School*, Washington Post, June 29, 1999

are able to pass as heterosexual might begin the process later and proceed more slowly. Opposite-gender sexual experience can prolong confusion or aid denial.

**Question 11:** *What are the stumbling blocks in homosexual identity development?*

In the beginning of the process some people try to rationalize the significance of their feelings or acts. "It was only a physical thing. I was just horny," is typical for boys. "It was loving and beautiful, and therefore not lesbian" may be a girl's mode of denial. "It only happened this once," "it's just a phase," "it was the liquor that made me do it," or "it isn't gay because neither male partner plays the woman" are also heard.

Some look for a cure through religion or medicine. Some flee from people of the opposite gender, whereas others have sex with them to hide the truth from themselves or others. Heterosexual promiscuity and pregnancy are common coverers. Some grasp at a bisexual identity to mitigate the stigma.

Some avoid facing their own psychological needs by immersion in hobbies, schoolwork, or giving care to others. They may use these activities as a screen against personal questions from others and strive for perfection to prove to themselves that they are not worthless.

Another form of denial is to shun information about gays and lesbians or even to attack them.

Even after coming out, there may be setbacks. Rejection may send one scurrying back into hiding in the "closet" or force one into "passing" as heterosexual. On the other hand, one may give in to societal expectations and adopt stereotypical appearance and gestures, becoming a caricature because of internalized homophobia

### BOX 2.7 WHAT A DEFENSE!

[I]n this macho, male-dominated culture [in Turkey], the only option for an openly gay person is to live on society's fringes in the most outlandish and outrageous manner possible. "If you are homosexual, society pushes you toward this feminine behavior. Society says if I feel a little bit womanish, I have to be a woman."

Tom Hundley, "Pushed to the Edge in Turkey," *Chicago Tribune*, December 19, 2000.

or as a self-defense. "Minstrelizing" as the "opposite gender" is one strategy, particularly for gay males in patriarchal cultures—the "act like the woman we think you really want to be and we'll cut you some slack" syndrome. (See box 2.7.)

#### Question 12: What is bisexuality?

The bisexual orientation spans the realm of erotic preferences and behaviors between exclusively homosexual and exclusively heterosexual. Since sexual orientation is complex and can be fluid over time, these divisions may seem arbitrary when applied to an individual.

There is a difference between transitional and mature bisexuality. The former is a way station on the path to a homosexual identity, a refuge until internalized homophobia is overcome. The latter is an authentic and lasting identity.

Some people mistakenly expect mature bisexuals to "get off the fence" and affiliate with one or the other side. Outright homophobes don't see much difference between bisexuality and homosexuality. And some gays and lesbians wrongly assume all bisexuality is a form of repression.

#### Question 13: What does a young person need to get through the identity process successfully?

Support and good information are vital. At the start, one can feel liberated yet also at a loss. Even if one's prior heterosexual identity did not feel genuine, its roles and expectations were at least clear. A gay future is usually less familiar. Moreover, one might encounter devaluation, rejection, and hostility from family members and peers.

Because media images of homosexuality are often distorted and negative, those who are questioning or just coming out need accurate school curricula.

### BOX 2.8 NAVIGATION AIDS

- Language (to understand oneself and to tell one's story)
- Humor (to put oneself, one's community, and even one's oppression into human context)
- Traditions and rituals (to bring people together and tie them to those who preceded them)
- Norms of conduct (to signal membership and, when rejected, non-conformity)
- Professional and personal roles (to suggest possibilities for sustenance and fulfillment)
- Political options (to offer agency)
- Strategies for stigma management (to thrive despite heterosexism)
- Opportunities for friendship, sexual experimentation, and love relationships (to develop capacities for sustaining interpersonal connections)

Adapted from L. D. Gamet and D. C. Kimmel, *Psychological Perspectives on Lesbian & Gay Male Experiences* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), introduction, p. 12.

(See chapter 7.) Furthermore, they require direct contact with other gay people and access to the subculture for affirmation, safety, and a sense of belonging. Finding their places in an open, confident, gay and lesbian community is nurturing on many levels. (See box 2.8.)

#### Question 14: Are there differences between male and female homosexual development?

Males tend to self-define following homosexual activity and generally equate being gay with erotic attraction rather than romantic connection. Of course, all young men are socialized to put sex before relationship. Gay men often resemble straight men in sexual assertiveness, roaming, valuing physical attributes, and finding love, if at all, after sexual conquest.

Because girls used to be conditioned to do the opposite, research on lesbians often found them self-defining after falling in love. Their erotic feelings evolved from prior emotional attachment. (See box 2.9.) Perhaps homosexual subculture has reinforced these gender differences. Until recently urban gay males were acculturated mostly in bars and other places where sex was the object. Lesbians

### BOX 2.9 LATE-BLOOMING

More than a decade ago, [Nancy] Walsh and [Carol] Fizyk met as nurses at Hale Hospital in Haverhill and became fast friends. Then they fell in love. No one was more surprised than Nancy Walsh that the object of their affection was a woman. "Totally, totally shocked," she said. She had been married for 19 years, then divorced, and had never before been involved with a woman. "You fall in love with a person, you don't fall in love with a sex," Walsh said.

Kathleen Burge, "Sep. 11 Leaves Same-Sex Partners Adrift," *Boston Globe Online*, [www.bostonglobe.com](http://www.bostonglobe.com) (March 18, 2002).

socialized in friendship circles and the women's community, where personal ties and mutual support were stressed. Because many women seem capable of intense connections to other women there were opportunities for their attachments to become homosexual relationships.

Women's sexual autonomy, partly a product of their economic advancement, has only enhanced those opportunities. (See box 2.10.) Moreover, as women in general grow less ashamed of their erotic appetites, lesbians, too, are freer for libidinous romps.

Lastly, since sexual identity and behavior can be more nuanced and fluid for women than for men, stage models may be less helpful for categorizing female development.

### Question 15: Isn't being homosexual generally the same for all homosexual people?

It is not a uniform identity. There are many ways to experience and express one's same-gender attractions. Thus, there are numbers of homosexual identities or "homosexualities."

Some folks think that homosexuality must overpower and displace all other aspects of a person's identity, that being gay or lesbian would make one have more in common with other homosexual people than with anyone else. A better analysis is that sexuality affects the other aspects of one's identity but is also likely affected by them.

The factors that influence one's sense of self and determine how one presents oneself to the world are an interdependent matrix. Gender, race, and ethnicity, for example, can affect one's sense of being gay. Conversely, one's homosexuality is likely to have an impact on one's gendered, racial, and ethnic "selves."

Cultural forces influence whether and how same-gender desire affects one's identity. Mass media and mobility have spread the idea of a monolithic Western "gay" identity around the world and have had an impact both in places where sexual behaviors are interpreted differently than in the West (see box 2.11.) and also in repressive states. The Internet is having a demonstrable effect in Eastern Europe and Asia. (See boxes 2.12 and 2.25.)

In the West, individuals with same-gender desires from different racial, ethnic, religious, class, and immigrant groups may reject the "gay" identity for themselves. And if they accept it, they face the challenge of forging their multiple identities into a new self in which sexuality does not harmfully diminish the other components.

### BOX 2.10 IMAGES AND EARNINGS

[The percentage of women who said they had recently had gay sex] climbed from 0.2% in 1988 to nearly 3% [in 1998]... [Amy C. Butler of the University of Iowa] suggests... that positive images of gay people in the media and declining legal and economic barriers may have made it easier for people to recognize their same-gender sexual interest and to act on it... Equalizing the earning potential of men and women may enable women to consider family structures and sexual partnerships that do not include men."

"More Americans Having Gay Sex, Study Shows," *Reuters Health*, March 14, 2001.

### BOX 2.11 EAST MEETS WEST: STRUGGLE AND PROGRESS

In a major reversal of previous policy, psychiatrists in this country of 1.3 billion people have decided to stop classifying homosexuality as a mental disease... [The American Psychiatric Association... [had] urged the Chinese group to change its stance... In December, a popular TV talk show originating in Hunan province and broadcast nationwide invited gay people on the set to talk about their experiences—a first for Chinese television.

Henry Chu, "Chinese Psychiatrists Decide Homosexuality Isn't Abnormal," *Los Angeles Times*, March 6, 2001.

### BOX 2.12 WIRED FOR CHANGE

Selslak, the software engineer, said he believes the Internet revolution, more than anything else, helped accelerate the gay revolution in Poland. . . . The access to information, to literature, to other gays—this is our real revolution," he said. . . . "Gays from my generation still feel this shame, and we are still afraid to talk openly, but not the new generation."

Tom Hundley, "Gay Life Gains Steam in Warsaw," *Chicago Tribune*, August 2, 2002.

*Question 16: Can people integrate their homosexuality into their other minority identities?*

The process can be difficult. Since racial, ethnic, class, and religious affiliations are usually well established by the time an individual begins to come out as gay, the homosexual component may appear to threaten one's other minority identities.

The pervasive image of the homosexual as white, Anglo, secular, and middle-class sends a message to immigrant, minority, working-class, and religious youth that to be gay they would have to abandon their neighborhoods, friends, cultures, faiths, and families. That would mean losing a dependable refuge from racial, ethnic, class, and religious intolerance. Yet homophobia in their culture of origin is also alienating.

Antigay/lesbian bias is no worse in any single minority group than it is in another or in the majority culture. Each group has its own homophobic ideas and behaviors. Some may be more subtle or polite than others, but they are no less damaging, particularly to the young.

Lastly, although we might generalize, no minority group is uniform. There are always individuals and sometimes subcultures within them that offer shelter and encouragement to gays and lesbians.

*Question 17: How does class relate to homosexual identity development?*

Compared to race and religion, little attention has been paid to the intersection of class and homosexuality. Rigid gender role expectations among working-class people may lead to the belief that homosexuals want to be the opposite gender. In fact, working-class gay and lesbian youth often engage in minstrelizing gender behavior, either because they agree that gay means gender inversion or because they suffer less hostility if they go along with the expectation. Since conservative views of gender and sexuality are related to less schooling, working-class gays and lesbians might suffer as a result of their family's lack of educational opportunity.

### BOX 2.13 POOR RELATIONS

See how hard you have to search for media images of queers who are part of the vast working poor in this country. Find the homeless transgendered folks. Find stories of gay immigrants, lesbian moms working three jobs, bisexual truckers falling asleep from too many hours on the road, gay men in the unemployment line. . . . The myth of our wealth goes deep, so deep that even other gay people seem to believe it. . . . We treat the poverty that exists among us—as well as the differences of class—as a dirty secret to be hidden, denied, repelled.

Amber Hollibaugh, "Queers without Money," *Village Voice*, June 20, 2001.

Poverty also limits access to counseling services, particularly in times of government cutbacks, so poor youth who need professional coming out support are at a disadvantage. In addition, low-income students in poor schools also have less chance of being exposed to up-to-date gay positive curricula and library holdings.

Poor people can also feel unwelcome in a mainstream gay movement that emphasizes middle-class proprieties and assimilation. (See box 2.13.)

*Question 18: How does being African American relate to homosexual identity development?*

For black gay youth in the United States (or in the West Indies, U.K., et al.) the three pillars of racial pride and solidarity—community, church, and family—can also be the sources of destructive homophobia.

The young black male peer group, like those of other races, often bonds through hypermasculinity and antigay harassment. Homophobia, in rap and reggae lyrics, for example, enforces the code of the "street." A male who listens to the wrong kind of music, does well in school, or avoids gangs, promiscuity, or violence can be gay-baited.

African American homophobia is linked to historical concerns about emasculation. Black manhood has been battered by the humiliations of slavery and the law enforcement, education, health, and welfare systems. Since male homosexuality is seen as feminizing and weakening, it is anathema in this context.

Gayness is also seen as a "white thing." This perception goes beyond media images. A black homosexual, it is thought, *learns* to be gay by associating with whites. It is an outside contagion. Because same-gender sex has traditionally had different meanings in Africa than in the West, gayness can be labeled a New World phenomenon to which black people, as colonized Africans or involuntary African American immigrants, have been exposed. (See box 2.14.)

### BOX 2.14 IN AFRICA: HOMOPHOBIA, DESPITE OLD TRADITIONS

Kenya's president, Daniel Arap Moi, derided homosexuality as a "scourge." ... "It is against African tradition and biblical teachings." ... "Homosexuality is against all the norms of African society and culture." [Zimbabwe's President] Mugabe once said: "Let them be gay in the United States, Europe and elsewhere. They shall be sad people here."

Chris McGreal. "Debr? War? Gays Are the Real Evil, Say African Leaders." *The Guardian* [U.K.], October 2, 1999.

"In some cultures in the northern part of Nigeria," [the president of Alliance Rights Nigeria says] "there are people called dan daudu. . . . It means 'men who are wives of men.' In olden days, to show your immense wealth, it was easy to have a harem of wives. But to show that you were truly rich, you had to keep a stable of men."

"Gays of Nation Unite!" *The News* [Lagos, Nigeria], April 22, 2002.

One hopes that the pro-gay stances of prominent African Americans like Coretta King and John Lewis and of Desmond Tutu and the South African constitution will change some of these homophobic ideas and behaviors.

*Question 19: What role does the black church play in this identity struggle?*

The black Christian church, a major force in community cohesion, has often been a source of estrangement for gays, lesbians, and bisexuals. African American ministers regularly condemn homosexuality from the pulpit as an abomination worse than other sins because it goes against the divine plan for the family. (See box 2.15.) The gay black man is sometimes depicted as a threat to racial survival. Gay black Muslims, scorned as "degenerate," don't fare any better in their mosques.

*Question 20: Is there no accommodation made to homosexuality in the black community?*

Homosexual African Americans have a long history, from humble church choir directors to luminaries like Bayard Rustin, Lorraine Hansberry, and Ralph Bunche. But it seems toleration has often hinged on keeping sexuality under cover, even if that meant marrying and leading a secret gay life on the side. Coming out publicly is not allowed and may even be frowned upon as a white practice.

### BOX 2.15 FEW SANCTUARIES

[R]umors of [Chris Coleman's] homosexuality had spread around the church, and rather than being welcomed back, he was mocked. . . . "As soon as I sat down, all of a sudden, the sermon got turned around to homosexuality. . . . It was about damnation. You heard how wrong it was. . . . There were times I would just leave, because it was too much."

Laura Putre. "Hell to Pay: Reviled as the Worst Sinners, Gay Black Men Find Refuge in the Closet." *Cleveland* [Ohio] Scene, October 4, 2001.

[T]he Rev. Kenneth Samuel is trying to lead his 6,000-strong congregation on a path few black churches have trod: wholehearted acceptance of lesbians and gays. After convincing himself that homophobia should be combated as zealously as racism, Samuel severed his Victory Church's links with black- and white-led Baptist organizations.

"Religion Today," *Associated Press*, May 16, 2002.

Open African American gays and lesbians have created a vibrant rich subculture in many places, including in the conservative South, yet they often struggle to find acceptance within the larger black community. The result can be social schizophrenia and denial. (See box 2.16.)

Gays and lesbians of color also face the dilemma of competing loyalties, the question: which are you first—black or gay? The relative significance of race versus sexual orientation to a person's identity may be related to the stigma he or she suffers because of either factor. Although race is usually more conspicuous than sexuality, it is not always so.

Greater social stigma, moreover, does not always result in greater self-identification, particularly when one's identifying features can be hidden. It might in fact drive an individual who can "pass" toward denial and repression. Racist and homophobic oppressions are different, yet linked. Both are driven by an appropriation of power to demean and control. Although *which are you first?* can lead to an interesting social and psychological case history, the question is in the end unfair to put to any individual.

*Question 21: Do black lesbians have an easier time?*

All black women face strong pressure to have families. Although demeaned, lesbians are still expected to marry, but without the same sexual freedoms afforded to gay and bisexual men. Less income allows even fewer options. Their invisibility