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*The intersection of race, faith, and sexual orientation is a
complicated place. This chapter examines students with
these multiple identities and uses theory and personal
accounts to illustrate the challenges of navigating
community on campus.*

Multiple Identities: Creating Community on Campus for LGBT Students

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The popularity of public figures such as Ellen Degeneres and Rosie
O'Donnell, and of television programs such as *Will and Grace, Queer Eye for
the Straight Guy,* and *Queer as Folk,* suggest that mainstream audiences are
tolerating and, perhaps, accepting lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender
(LGBT) people. More often than not, however, these entertainers and tele-
vision shows reflect only one LGBT community, one whose members are
white and not religious. This perception of the LGBT community is com-
mon on college and university campuses, too. As one African American stu-
dent commented:

> I had been a member of BSA (Black Student Association) my freshman year,
> but was discouraged when I consistently encountered homophobic attitudes
> in the organization. My friends and I often laughed at our slogan for it, 'It's
> either Gay or BSA!' We also couldn't help but notice the undercurrent of
> racism within the gay community. It was passive and subtle, but clear. Our
> white LGBT peers felt as though the LGBT student organization was not
> meeting their needs because programming and social events were too ethnic
> or "did not reflect who they were or their interests" [Mills, 2005, n.p.].

A gay seminary student noted similar experiences:

> I feel caught in the middle. It's a guarded situation. At the divinity school I face a lot of stereotypes that you would assume a Christian organization would have about homosexuality. Likewise, as a Christian you face stereotypes that homosexuals have for Christians. The main thing for me is that there is no welcoming community for people like me. Community is something that you have to create for yourself. The small group of gay Christians I brought together is a community that we built, but my experience in the [LGBT] Center is that LGBT students look at us from a distance. It is the same way that the divinity students look at the gay divinity students. "I'm not part of them." They see the differences and not the commonalities [P. Shoe, personal communication, January 18, 2005].

As these quotations illustrate, developing or finding community can be a difficult task when sexual orientation, race, and faith collide. As student affairs professionals, we have a duty to understand the students and student populations with whom we work. We should expect that LGBT students on our campuses comprise much diversity. "Gay" does not always imply white or atheist. To this end we discuss the intersection of race, faith, and sexual orientation and share some of the complexities of finding and creating community.

The Intersections of Identity Development Theory

It may be best to view the development of students with multiple identities not as a linear series of stages, but as complex processes of simultaneous tasks and challenges. The multiple identities of an LGBT person interact with and affect one another. The development of one identity—such as race—can cause regression or progress in another, such as sexual orientation. A questioning of previous beliefs caused by the development of one identity can create dissonance to be resolved only by greater understanding of how these multiple identities can benefit one another. This resolution can occur satisfactorily in conditions that provide contact with other multiple-identity LGBT people and groups within the context of affirming environments.

Identity Development Theory

Theories of identity development rarely address overlapping and multiple identities and how they intersect. Such monocultural or single-focused theories have an inherent limitation in that they do not consider how other minority or cultural identities affect developmental processes. We recognize this limitation (see Chapter Three for a more complete examination) and use the three theories explained here, in brief, as a framework to begin to create a better understanding of the intersection of multiple identities.

LGB Identity Development. Fassinger (Fassinger and Miller, 1997; McCarn and Fassinger, 1996) explains LGB sexual identity development as

along two parallel branches: the individual and the group. The group branch is defined by how an individual "identifies with or actively participates in gay or lesbian culture(s)" (Fassinger and Miller, 1996, p. 55). How an LGB student identifies or views the LGBT campus community influences this group branch. Further development along this group identity will be partly dependent on integrating other identities, such as faith.

Faith Development. "Faith is how people become aware of self, others, and the transcendent. It is how people make meaning out of, and commitment based upon what they have become, learned, or discovered" (DuMontier, 2000, p. 323). Organized religion has not been welcoming of—and in some cases has been hostile to—LGBT people. While there has been much progress on this front, the importance of this hostile environment cannot be underestimated or considered lightly. This hostility can directly influence the faith development of an LGBT student. Fowler explains faith development in six stages. Stage four, "individual-reflective faith," occurs when an individual "begins to define and take responsibility for a world view that is internally driven" (as quoted in DuMontier, 2000, p. 325). Thus, developing an LGBT identity might create a need to find a faith community or an LGBT community that is affirming and supportive of a person's faith and sexual or gender identity. "This requires a genuine openness to others and a willingness to enter into dialogue . . . even at the risk of changing a person's own way of making meaning and relating to the world" (Rutledge, 1989, p. 21).

Racial Identity Development. Individuals of a racial minority might not identify with an LGBT community seen largely as white and thus will not readily accept a sexual identity as LGBT. Cross's five-stage model of racial identity development (1971) describes processes of encounter, immersion, and internalization. How does being non-heterosexual affect these particular identity stages for a person of color? Perhaps they will "attempt to shift the conflict from a monocultural perspective (i.e. either Latino or LGBT) to a multicultural dimension (Latino and LGBT) in which their lives can be viewed as containing multiple identities" (Chan, 1995, p. 93).

A Just Community

Among Boyer's six principles of campus community is the assertion that "a college or university is a just community, a place where the sacredness of each person is honored and where diversity is aggressively pursued" (1990, p. 25). Although Boyer emphasized diversity of race and sex in his original description of a just community, surely a reevaluation of this work today could not ignore LGBT students. Recognition of people with multiple identities or multiple minority identities must be constructed on campus as well as learning across those differences. Boyer also explains, in his description of an open community, that "the quality of a college . . . must be measured by the quality of communication on campus" that includes "clarity of

expression" and "civility" (p. 17). The students with whom we work should be listening to, and learning from, one another as well as speaking across homogenous and monocultural lines.

Making Connections

Student affairs administrators play a key role in creating connections between and among oppressed and privileged groups on campus. Administrators need to manage a difficult balance between the desires and needs of monocultural or homogenous groups and the need for cross-cultural communication and learning. The challenge remains that students often are not found conversing across such delineations of privilege and oppression and segregate themselves in homogeneous communities of comfort.

Organizations of LGBT students, as well as those of other minority groups, have been accused of self-segregation. Yet many other student organizations are composed of homogeneous interests. Athletes, Bible-study groups, marching-band members, and sociology students are just a few examples of students who congregate and communicate on the basis of common interests and identities. In the same way, LGBT and race-based groups form for mutual support as well as to create a basis for connection to the broader campus community. Widespread intolerance, lack of acceptance, and the failure of the campus community to create hospitable campus climates also contribute to the formation of minority student organizations (Tatum, 1999).

The need and inclination to be with those similar to oneself create conflicts for students with multiple identities. Multiple-identity LGBT people have to contend with racism and religious intolerance from within the LGBT community and from homophobia within the various heterosexual minority and religious communities. Rejection in the form of racism and homophobia creates an almost insurmountable hurdle to finding community. Yet without spaces for open and authentic conversations across multiple minority identities, true community cannot be achieved.

One student commented on this dilemma: "My job is doubly hard. I have to help educate not only the straight community about gay issues but I also have to educate the black community, and that's next to impossible. Homophobia is really strong with the black community" (Rhoads, 1994, p. 135).

A Christian LGBT student shared his experience in his own faith community on campus: "When we talk about LGBT issues and faith the response is, 'It's already been talked about.' The problem is that incoming students are not part of that situation and they have to face those issues over and over again. The divinity school talked about gay people in response to the covenant code before I arrived on campus and now they think they discussed homosexuality" (P. Shoe, personal communication, January 18, 2005).

An African American student described his attempt to connect with a gay student group on campus:

> When I first came here I tried to reach out to (the student group) LGBSA, and when I went to one of the meetings it took me a half-hour just to work up the courage to walk into the room. When I got there I saw that there was nobody else who was black except maybe for one other person. After the meeting not a single person walked up to me and introduced themselves. No one said anything to me. Then this guy on my floor who claimed to be straight was doing a paper for a class on gays and so he went to an LGBSA meeting. He is tall, has good features, and is attractive and white. He went to a meeting and after it was over he said two or three people came up to him and introduced themselves and were very friendly to him. He talked about his paper on our hall one time, and I remember thinking to myself, 'This can't be the same meeting I went to.' It really woke me up to the white gay community and its racism" [Rhoads, 1994, p. 136].

All of these examples illustrate challenges for multiple-identity minority students. Student affairs professionals must ask themselves how they can support these students and create communities that are safe for learning and exploration. To work effectively with these differences we must understand how students make meaning of these multiple identities.

Navigating Multiple-Identity Conflict

How do multiple-identity LGBT people shift from being either a person of color or a person who is religious to a person who integrates these identities? Does integration of identities occur? Possible outcomes include identifying with multiple groups and integrating these identities (such as viewing oneself as both African American and lesbian), identifying with one group exclusively to the detriment of others (for example, a woman portrays herself as Native American culturally and spiritually yet ignores a public LGBT identity due to fear of reprisal in a dominant Christian environment), or identifying with one group at a given time (for example, a Latino male identifies himself as gay in a predominantly white LGBT community yet does not do so among Latino friends and family) (Reynolds and Pope, 1991).

Language is one of the major challenges in understanding and engaging multiple identities. For African Americans, for example, the terms *lesbian, gay, bisexual,* and *transgender* are often associated with white culture (Boykin, 1996). As a result, many people of color distance themselves from these terms and have crafted others, as described by Boykin (2005):

- *Same-gender loving.* Often used by people of color who are comfortable with their same-sex attraction but do not connect with the social and

political connotations that come with the terms *lesbian, gay, bisexual,* and *transgender*

- *Men who have sex with men.* A term created by the Centers for Disease Control in 1987 to describe men who do not use the labels *gay* or *bisexual* but who participate in same-sex sexual behaviors
- *DL,* or *Down Low.* A new term popular in the black and Latino communities referring to men who do not identify themselves as gay but who have sex with men as well as with female partners.

Each of these terms carries social and political implications that cannot be addressed in this short piece. It is important to note, however, that the common denominator is same-sex attraction or connection. Understanding the complexities that culture, community, and religion bring to sexual minorities is important if we are to create environments where these individuals can grow.

Implications for Student Affairs Practice

As we enter these uncharted waters, the professional literature in student affairs provides little information to identify best practices. However, groups such as the National Consortium of Directors of LGBT Resources in Higher Education, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF), and the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) Standing Committee for LGBT Awareness are initiating ongoing discussions within their respective organizations and collaboratively with one another to assist in developing supportive and responsive communities for students with multiple minority identities.

Campus staff must be fully engaged in creating a cross-cultural community that is just, civil, and open. Avenues of expression need to be created that provide spaces, programs, classroom discussions, and living-learning communities about and for multiple-minority students. The following five suggestions are intended to foster discussion and thought about the issues raised in this chapter:

- Allow students to "name" themselves and their identities. Don't ask them to choose one identity over the other.
- Engage all students in discussions of their race, religion, and other identities.
- Work with campus religious leaders and the multicultural or ethnic offices and leaders to engage and address issues of sexual orientation and gender identity.
- Seek opportunities to bring expert speakers to campus, and seek campus role models to speak to the complexities of multiple identities that include being a sexual minority.

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