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## Context

*A moral imperative, that all students must be able to exist within inclusive school structures where they feel safe physically and psychologically, must be upheld because young people are required by law to attend school rather than having a choice.*

—Linda K. Corbin (2011, p. 1)

### GETTING CENTERED

Take a few minutes to think about and respond to the following questions:

- What terms would you use to describe your sexual orientation?
- To what extent have you ever thought about your having a sexual orientation?
- What might be some ways to describe your feelings when colleagues talk about their own gender identity and sexual orientation?
- What are your feelings as you read and respond to these questions?

Please use the following space to record your responses to these questions, your comments, and questions that you might have. Also take a moment to write how you felt while responding to these questions.

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This chapter

- Introduces the historical nature of sexual orientation and gender identity inequity and equity as the context for understanding self within school roles of parent/guardian, student, or educator.
- Identifies and defines terms used to describe LGBT communities and presents nonoffensive language that can be used by educators. While many more terms are used to describe aspects of sexuality and sexual orientation, this list applies only to terms used in this book, which we believe you may find useful in conversations with your colleagues and community members.
- Provides an introduction to the Tools of Cultural Proficiency as a means of guiding personal and organizational actions that support access to equitable academic outcomes and extracurricular involvement for all students.

## SEXUAL ORIENTATION AS AN EQUITY ISSUE

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) communities are too often viewed only in terms of perceived sexual behavior and rarely as cultural groups with norms and values that shape their lives. Confusion and misperceptions exist about who is in what is often referred to as the “LGBT” community. This book intends to counter and confront those issues by clarifying the importance of knowing and understanding these cultural groups as well as acknowledge the make-up of the several demographic groups within this highly diverse community.

Two of the authors were conducting a professional learning session with a group of educational leaders recently using *Culturally Proficient Leadership: The Personal Journey Begins Within* (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009). One of the activities invited participants to respond in writing to a series of prompts that included “Describe when you first became aware of your gender”; “Describe when you first became aware of your race and/or ethnicity”; “Describe when you first became aware of your social class”; and “Describe when you first became aware of your sexual orientation.” Everyone was thoughtfully engaged in writing. We observed people thinking hard as evidenced by furrowed brows, sighs, giggles, and fierce writing. About twenty minutes into the activity, one of the participants asked in a very attentive and serious tone, “Ray and Randy, I don’t know how to respond to the sexual orientation prompt. I am straight.” Everyone sat upright in seeming stunned silence to see how we might respond. While we were measuring our response, one of his friends cut the awkward silence with, “Dude, straight *is* a sexual orientation.” The participant flushed with mild embarrassment and everyone laughed aloud, somewhat nervously.

Though this experience offered a moment of levity, it also provided opportunity for a profound lesson. Sexual orientation is common to all humans. Sexual orientation and gender diversity are common throughout humanity (Murray, 2000). Left unspoken and unacknowledged, issues that arise from misconceptions about sexual orientation and gender identity foster discrimination, marginalization, and brutality toward LGBT students, family/community members, and educators. The civil rights energy unleashed in the 1960s has been slow to address sexual orientation and gender identity as equity issues in the manner that we acknowledge race, ethnicity, language acquisition, gender, social class, and special needs. Though equity has not been totally achieved in those areas, progress is being made, and one of the hallmarks of progress will be when we no longer single out the equity issues to be addressed in our schools.

We begin this journey of Cultural Proficiency by examining the language we use. Our words and phrases sometimes reveal underlying values and, at other times, awkward ignorance. Ignorance is not necessarily bad. At its core, ignorance is “not knowing.” One of the basic tenets of Cultural Proficiency involves an “inside-out approach” to our learning, both personally and institutionally. By examining our language, we overcome our ignorance to become better informed and, in turn, can examine our values and behaviors in a manner that can lead to more authentic communication and problem solving with and in LGBT communities.

## OUR LANGUAGE: AN EQUITY INDICATOR

*How do “they” want to be addressed?* is a common question posed by many beginning this journey. We can begin the journey by acknowledging that names and nicknames are extremely personal, almost sacred elements of many cultures. However, we also know that labels and categories complicate matters of identity even further. In moments of hesitation, we may ask ourselves, *Will I make a mistake if I use this term or that term?* Cross-cultural communications create consternation for many people. Epithets, insults, and charges of being politically correct abound in our schools across the continent. Our experience has been that two underlying dynamics add to miscommunication and misunderstandings:

- A lack of skill and confidence for being involved in cross-cultural communications
- A lack of will in the organizational culture, whether collective or collaborative groups, of many schools to promote mindful, cross-cultural communications

One of the purposes of this chapter is to clarify terms commonly associated with sexual orientation and gender identity as one way to develop new skills and confidence and build collaborative behaviors to work cross-culturally. In this section, we review terminology that, when mastered, equips you with information that may be new to you and, most important, will be accurate and will protect the integrity of all involved. Later in this chapter and in Chapter 3, equity is discussed as a concept that heightens the integrity of dominant and nondominant groups alike.

A prominent feature of this book is a case story developed in Chapters 6 through 10 that presents positive and constructive application of the Tools of Cultural Proficiency. In this opening chapter, characters from the case story are introduced in a brief vignette as a means to introduce concepts, social dynamics, and issues common in our schools and communities. Read the following short vignette and spend a few moments reflecting on the prompts that follow. As you proceed through the book you will learn that we rely on reflection and dialogue as means to internalize the information in ways that will be useful to you personally as an educator as well as being a member of a school learning community. The ensuing vignette introduces members of the Westfield Unified School District (WUSD) case story and provides a glimpse of some issues dealt with in Chapters 6 through 10. Sharon, Thomas, and Seth are teachers at one of the high schools in WUSD. They are leaving school one day and engage in the following conversation:

### *Story*

- Sharon:** *I am not interested in learning about how homosexuals live.*
- Thomas:** *Yeah, before you know it, we are going to be decorating a float for gay pride day and, then, trying to keep our students from using the 3-letter “F” word.*
- Sharon:** *I think the word is gay. The PC police have excised one more perfectly good word from our “acceptable use” vocabulary. The “F” word is supposed to be as offensive as the “N” word.*
- Seth:** *Well, that is right. I couldn’t help but overhear what you were saying. The professional development session we are having next week is supposed to help us.*
- Thomas:** *Help us! Are you kidding? Having a workshop on personal behavior that I find reprehensible and morally wrong is not going to help me to teach math.*
- Seth:** *No, it won’t. So thank goodness that is not what the PD is about. We are going to learn how to work with our LGBT colleagues, students, and families.*

**Sharon:** *Oh, you mean like Anna and Evelyn. Daniel told us what happened. He left a message for them the other day. When he called them, he said, “I know your child has two mothers, I would like the real parent to show up for the teacher conference.”*

**Seth:** *Yes, that’s what I mean!*

## Reflection

Take a few minutes to think about and respond to the following questions:

- If you were part of the conversation in the preceding section, what might you be thinking?
- What might you say? Why?
- What questions do you want to have answered in this chapter?
- Please use the space below to record your responses. Record your feelings that surfaced when reading this conversation.

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## RANGE OF SEXUAL DIFFERENCES AND ASSOCIATED TERMINOLOGY

Popular descriptions of sexuality are often in polar opposite terms—a person is male or female, gay or straight. However, the reality is that sexual orientation is more of a range along a line rather than a fixed, single point. The place range for some people might be very specific, often making it difficult to imagine an orientation other than theirs. The locale along the range of sexual orientation or gender identity for others may be quite long, which might ease their relating to people with different sexual orientations or gender identity.

Murray (2000), a highly respected authority of homosexuality from global and historical perspectives, notes that “no single type *homosexual* with a unique set of characteristics exists” (p. 1). He correctly observes that the same range of intracultural diversity exists within homosexual communities as there are within “Latino or Chinese or Italian, working-class or upper-class behaviors, typifications, self-identifications, and meanings” (p. 1).

Whether you are new to this discussion or a veteran well versed about the terms and issues that affect human sexual orientation and gender

identity, we present key terms used throughout this book to support your reading. This chapter presents and defines those key terms. Resource B in the Appendix has terms that, though not all are part of this book, are germane to our ongoing learning about topics related to sexual orientation and gender diversity.

Key terms to inform your reading as you proceed through this book:

- **Culture:** Murray's (2000) contention that "*Culture*" like "*homosexuality*" is an abstraction appropriately frames discussions about humans organizing and creating groups across gender, racial, religious, social, and work identities (p. 8). A popular definition of culture, "the way we do things here," is an often-used, shorthand way to describe commonalities within categories of people. We use the term *culture* to refer to groupings of people with seemingly common characteristics, such as race, gender identity, sexual orientation, social class, ableness, and religious/faith/spirituality affiliation, among many others. It is the imprecision of use of the term culture that leads to the observation that there is as much diversity within cultures as there is among cultures. For our purpose, we persist in using the term culture in inclusive ways that frame the assets that exist among group members as opposed to the all-too-frequent function of stigmatizing the differences of "others" as deficits.

- **Sexual orientation:** "A person's emotional, physical, and sexual attraction to members of the opposite gender (heterosexual), same gender (gay or lesbian), or both (bisexual)" (Campos, 2005, p. 110).

- **Sexual identity:** The term a person uses to identify or describe his or her sexuality. One may identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender and one's sexual behavior may or may not be congruent with that person's sexual identity (Campos, 2005; Murray, 2000).

- **Gender identity:** "A person's self-perception or self-acceptance of being male, female, both or neither (androgynous)" (Campos, p. 107).

- **Homosexuals:** People attracted to members of their gender.

- **Heterosexuals:** People attracted to members of the opposite gender.

- **Gay:** Miller (2006) notes that the term *gay* is a fairly new term with many usages, emerging in the 1950s probably from the French word *gaie*. The term is most often used when describing homosexual men; however, it is sometimes used by lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people when describing themselves (p. 328).

- **Lesbian:** A term traced to ancient Greek history and the poet Sappho who lived on the island of Lesbos. It refers to homosexual women.

- **Transgender:** An umbrella term for many different gender identities. It can include anyone who sees himself or herself as a gender that is different from the gender he or she was assigned at birth. For example, a person may have been raised as a boy, but now sees herself as completely female or raised as a girl and now sees himself as completely male. Other transgender people may have an alternate gender identity that is neither male nor female, and for some people their gender identity may vary at different points in their lives. Some transgender people modify their bodies through medical means, such as hormones or surgeries, and some do not. These choices are highly individualized and influenced by medical, financial, and personal reasons and should not impact how much we see a person as a “real” man or a “real” woman. Gender identity is different from sexual orientation, and transgender people may identify as gay, straight, bisexual, queer, or have a fluid sexual orientation.

- **LGBTQ:** The Q is used for queer or questioning. The term *queer* has historically been used as an epithet against homosexuals, but now it is a term appropriated by many gay men and lesbians, as well as bisexual and transgender individuals to strongly affirm pride in their identity. The term *questioning* refers to people who are questioning their sexual orientation or identity and may, in time, identify as heterosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual, or be in the process of becoming transgender (Campos, 2005; Webber, 2010).

- **Heterosexism:** The system of beliefs and practices that exclude and demean those who are, or are perceived to be, same-sex oriented. Heterosexism includes the promotion by individuals and/or institutions of the superiority of heterosexuality over all other orientations. Heterosexist beliefs include the assumption that everyone should be heterosexual and that everyone is heterosexual, unless known to be otherwise, and that non-heterosexuals are unnatural. Heterosexism can be intentional or unintentional. Heterosexist beliefs also refer to beliefs that lead people to invalidate the experiences intentionally or unintentionally of LGBT communities. Like other forms of discrimination, heterosexism is often invisible to those who are oblivious to discrimination or marginalization toward others. The belief that heterosexuality is a choice and is the appropriate choice to make and having the power to oppress or discriminate against those who do not make that choice is heterosexism.

- **Homophobia:** This term stems from the deep fear many heterosexuals have of sexual diversity. Homophobia is the term often used to describe personal forms of heterosexism, including verbal and physical abuse. Some find the roots of the term (the irrational fear of same-sex

oriented people or feelings) useful in addressing heterosexist attitudes. However, others prefer to use the more inclusive term, *heterosexism*, to describe all forms of discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people.

- **Sexual preference:** A misnomer term used by people who assume that who one is attracted to is a choice. There is growing evidence that sexual orientation is an innate trait (Campos, 2005; Sullivan, 2008).
- **Lifestyle:** A misnomer often used to assume that homosexuality is chosen. Similar to sexual preference.
- **Internal language:** Refers to words and phrases that a community uses to address its own members. Sometimes words are used within a community that would be experienced as inflammatory, insulting, or hurtful if used by someone outside of the community. This use is confusing to outsiders who believe that if a word is inappropriate for one group to use, it should be inappropriate for all to use. However, this is a way that many cultures, especially nondominant groups, distinguish between members of their group and others. Think how family members address one another. They often use language that would be totally unacceptable coming from anyone outside the family unit. It is important therefore, not to use a term about a group because you have heard group members using it: Rather, one should err on the side of formality and ask how a person prefers to be addressed or described.

*Sexual orientation, gender identity, and sexual preference*, as you now know from our usage, are not interchangeable terms. For this reason, in this book, we use the terms sexual orientation and gender identity. Sexual orientation and gender identity are the preferred usage in LGBT communities and are terms that convey a person's sexuality. Resource B provides a quick glossary of words and terms that relate to LGBT communities.

## THE TOOLS OF CULTURAL PROFICIENCY

An often-used phrase holds that “the ultimate power is the power to define.” In absence of accurate information, stereotypes about people become the definitive perspective. Earlier we described and discussed terms that reveal what we know about sexual orientation and gender diversity and, often, our levels of comfort in talking about these topics. Knowledge can be increased with accurate information. Comfort can be heightened with accurate information coupled with a moral frame that values people for who they are rather than who you would like them to be.

The Tools of Cultural Proficiency provide a framework to guide examining personal values and behaviors and organizational policies and practices. As you read Chapter 2 about the Tools, you are guided in exploring an *inside-out* approach to change. Cross (1989) created this inside-out approach to personal and organizational change, and it has been the hallmark of each of our books on Cultural Proficiency. Now that you have an understanding of the terminology of sexual orientation, you will be able to use this book as a guide to becoming a more effective educator.

## GOING DEEPER

*Personal Reflection:* Take a moment to think and respond to these questions:

- What questions do you still have about terminology or appropriate language in support of LGBT communities?
- Now that you have read this chapter, will you change any of your language?
- What would you like to share about what you have read and learned? If so, in what ways?
- With whom will you share it?

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*Dialogic Activity:* Upon reading this chapter . . .

- What might be a learning initiative that you as a school staff want to undertake with regard to LGBT topics and issues?
- What might be your first steps?
- Who will take which responsibilities?
- In what ways will this book support your learning initiative?
- In what ways will you measure progress or success?

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The journey to Cultural Proficiency is facilitated through the Tools referenced earlier in this chapter. In Chapter 2 you will learn about the Tools of Cultural Proficiency and the manner in which they support and facilitate your personal and organizational learning. The tools are these:

- **Overcoming the Barriers to Cultural Proficiency:** A description of how systemic oppression and a sense of privilege and entitlement foster resistance to change and an unawareness of our need to adapt, both of which limit our cross-cultural effectiveness
- **Guiding Principles of Cultural Proficiency:** A discussion of nine core values to inform our personal values and beliefs as well as our institutional policies and practices
- **The Continuum:** A six-point range of descriptors for behaviors, values, policies, and practices that illustrate the manner in which Barriers to Cultural Proficiency inform negative values/behaviors and policies/practices and how the Guiding Principles inform positive values/behaviors and policies/practices
- **Essential Elements:** Five standards of cultural competence used to craft effective personal/professional behaviors and school/institutional practices