

# The Truth Is Out There

Is reality stranger than fiction? For this issue the "Out On Campus" editorial board has decided to explore the "truths" and "realities" of being LGBT in our society and in academia. The results are as diverse as the stars in the sky. As you read this issue you will see articles about the uncovering of truth through the use of historical fiction, the search for community, the reality of life in RIC's residence halls, and much more. We encourage you to find inspiration in this month's explorations and to seek your own "truths." We hope that you find, as we did, that the reality of life in the LGBT community is not the same for each person and it is the richness of this diversity we should treasure.

## Rewriting History

By Mary Ball Howkins

In this age of LGBT comic books, many of them issuing from San Francisco and paralleling the growth of straight comic narratives, one that rewrites history is of some interest. By Justin Hall, it's entitled *A Sacred Text*, and was published in 2002 by All Thumbs Press (allthumbspress.com). A frame tale, enclosing one story within another, *A Sacred Text* presents a narrative recollected by a man named Nkota as told to his great niece, both of them somewhere in the Middle East/Africa in ancient times. The story is set in visual frames deliberately inelegant and down to earth, ones that mirror the variety found in cinematic angle and editing. Nkota's tale begins by chronicling his youthful escape from enslavement by the Thesanyi, the region's dominant and feared empire, and his subsequent finding of temporary if initially problematic sanctuary among the clandestine Qumari, or Children

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## The Truth about Identity Development

By Jan Park

Whether a person is oriented toward the opposite gender, the same gender, or is bisexual, coming to some resolution about the numerous issues related to sexuality and identity is an important task in late adolescence and early adulthood. One's affectional orientation guides not only the obvious choice of love partner but is also tied to the kind of family one will create and the career path a person will follow. The college years are often the first ones during which people have the freedom to explore. There's nothing quite like the emotional charge of infatuation or sexual romance. A

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# Urvashi Vaid To Speak At RIC

Urvashi Vaid, former executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, author, attorney, and lesbian activist, will be the Spring Diversity Symposium Speaker on April 21, from 12:30-2 p.m., in Gaige Hall. Her talk is entitled "JUSTICE or JUST-US: Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Politics and the Challenge of Diversity." Vaid will discuss the current legal and political status of LGBT equality, and the current challenges and debates the movement faces.

Her lecture will address the tensions that arise from race, gender, class and political diversity in the LGBT movement. Her talk will be followed by two or three interactive workshops, including one with Vaid, examining moral, religious and political opposition to LGBT rights as well as the movement's responses. An excerpt from Vaid's book *Virtual Equality* is available from Dialogue on Diversity Co-chairs Mary Ball Howkins, ext. 9511, Tony Teng, ext. 8640, or Ellen Bigler, ext. 8385.

**"The movement I work in might be called a gay and lesbian movement, but its mission is the liberation of all people. To me, my mission is about ending sexism, about ending racism, and about ending homophobia."**



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## Howkins, Continued from Pg. 1

of Light. The Qumari are monotheists, and as such resented, and ultimately hunted by the polytheist Thesanyi. After a shaky reception, Nkota is welcomed by the Qumari religious leader and from him learns some of the tribe's religious beliefs. Eventually he is befriended by a young Qumari named Sachen, who is curious to learn from the outsider and over time willing to be more accepting of Nkota's outsider ways. During the course of their evolving friendship, we learn that Nkota, originally from a matrilineal society, prefers men to the company of women, and so could not fulfill what the Qumari believe is a sacred obligation to sire children. We learn also that Sachen harbors a small carved figure from his childhood, a carving that suggests that his cultural and religious origins, before adherence to the Qumari faith, are southern and indeed the same as Nkota's. A Thesanyi patrol discovers the Qumari sanctuary, possibly as a result of following Nkota's trail, and so a slaughter begins, one that will quickly lead to the eradication of the small tribe. The old priest takes Nkota into his confidence and asks him to escape via a hidden chamber taking with him the tribe's sacred texts. Nkota agrees and in the process discovers that mural paintings in the chamber have long ago foretold of an outsider's arrival and keeping the Qumari sacred texts from harm.

What is refreshing about this comic book narrative is its subtle grazing of a gay theme in the context of dramatizing historical religious and political conflict, albeit fictional rather than specifically recorded. It reminds us of the contrasting traditions that vied for room in the ancient world and that presaged the monotheism that has so engaged the Western world. It reminds us as well of the on-going need for religious tolerance, and of the likelihood that LGBT persons at times played pivotal roles in historical events despite the historical and contemporary official versions that remain silent regarding their presence and contributions. While *A Sacred Text* hints that Nkota's predilection for men humiliated the Thesanyi imperial family and contributed to his need to escape, it backgrounds that particular narrative to the urgent issues facing the Qumari and the contest for religious hegemony in the past. The fictional Nkota may have been at the "right" place at the "right" time in light of Qumari need, but he was in no position to have his name recorded for his deeds in the imaginary world in which he found himself. Such has been the position of LGBT people throughout most moments in history, as well as in the present, and *A Sacred Text* underscores that reality while promoting tolerance of religion and of affectional identity. The "southern people," whose culture birthed both Nkota and Sachen, are painted in brief as ideally fusing many years of hardship. Will mainstream comic book narratives reflect a world in our millennium of increasing acceptance beyond simple tolerance and of moving toward the barely recalled gender balance of this fictional "south" by the year 3000? I'd like to think so. *A Sacred Text* can be purchased for a modest sum via the All Thumbs Press website.

## Park, Continued from Pg. 1

person may feel simultaneously exhilarated and terrified about taking risks. Feelings range from those of liberation to confusion or guilt. Most students make some mistakes along the way, before finding a suitable partner.

Students can sometimes try to force "coming out" issues to a hasty resolution, either in themselves or friends, which isn't always helpful or realistic. We live in a world where there is a considerable level of anxiety that accompanies the topic of sexuality in general. Sometimes slapping on a label is a misguided effort to cope. It takes time to sort out who one is by learning through relationships and contact with others who seem to share values and interests. Learning to live with ambiguity is an important attitude to cultivate, whether it's you or a friend doing the questioning.

Sexual orientation can be thought of as one component of sexuality "distinguished by an enduring emotional, romantic, sexual or affectional attraction to individuals of a particular gender" (APA pamphlet, "Answers to Your Questions About Sexual Orientation and Homosexuality"). Three other components of sexuality are biological sex, gender identity (the psychological sense of being male or female), and the cultural norms in effect for social sex roles. The ways that all of these strands weave together influence who we are in our everyday lives. Most mental health professionals do not consider sexual orientation to be a conscious choice that can be changed voluntarily, although there are various theories about how one develops sexual orientation.

A person may have same-gender romantic or sexual experiences but not be gay. Sexual behavior and sexual orientation are different aspects of who someone is. People can express or choose not to express their sexual orientation in behavior (people who remain "in the closet", or some priests for example). Others engage in same-gender, sexual behavior but do not self-identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual as their self-concept or "political" identity. These may be people who are seeking information about who they are by exploring sexually, which in the best possible world would be an acceptable part of a process of identity formation. Some people may be engaging in behavior that they will never consider as the basis for their identity. In both examples, it should be the right of the individual to determine who one is, not the job of well or ill intentioned others to make this determination.

Ultimately most people arrive at some sense of congruence between sexual orientation, behavior, and values. They establish a sense of identity which guides their choices through at least some portion of their lives. Of course people "come out" at different ages in adulthood or shift orientations when faced with new possibilities for growth in different social contexts. It's not over until it's over. Hopefully wherever you are in your journey, you will find some inner contentment, and the kind of external support to be who you are, at least for now.

## Judith Butler Speaks!



Judith Butler, well known as a theorist of power, gender, sexuality and identity, will be speaking on Campus at noon on Friday March 26 in Gaige 100. The Title of her talk will be: "The Meaning and Limits of Sovereignty: A Critique of the US Patriot Act." Call Katherine Rudolph in the Philosophy Dept. at 456-9690 for more info.

# You Can't Handle The Truth!

By Mike Gorman

When sitting down to write this piece I found myself torn, struggling to answer the question, "What is the truth about living 'out' in the residence halls?" My first response was to get defensive. As a member of the residence hall staff here at RIC for the past five years I have seen many changes in how LGBT concerns are addressed and supported in our buildings, so I wanted to make sure everyone had that information. I wanted to make sure that the casual reader, with no links to the residence halls, would know that we are not just breeding grounds for homophobia and hate crimes. I created a well detailed list of our educational efforts, staff training programs, policies, and procedures. I then sat back and said, "This is all well and good, but maybe it is the personal stories that people need to hear." So I spoke with several students asking them what challenges they face living as LGBT people on campus. I heard tales of harassment and acceptance, of rejection and celebration. As I began to combine their stories into a coherent article, I found myself focusing on the negatives. I wanted to make sure that it was clear that there are still challenges faced by LGBT individuals every day in their lives. *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* running opposite the Superbowl hardly means that all of the homophobia has gone away.

I had looked at the change and development of our community and found the picture incomplete. I had looked at the day-to-day lives of LGBT students and found a narrow focus. I was still unsure of how I would find the truth for myself. This article became the elephant sitting in my office that I did not want to talk about and then it happened. Inspiration appeared in the form of a giant white sheet of paper and a pen on a string.

One of my resident assistants put up a bulletin board display about the debate over gay marriage. Next to the board, she posted a large sheet of white paper with a pen and the question "What do you think about this issue?" As a staff we braced ourselves for all of the different comments that could appear with the expectation that someone would eventually make harassing, derogatory comments. A week after the board appeared what has developed, to our surprise, is an intelligent discussion of the rights of LGBT people and the beliefs of our community. The wall near the board is now full of individuals' opinions both for and against gay marriage expressed with respect. Looking at that paper I realized that there is no simple truth to what life is like for LGBT individuals in the residence halls.

Some days you feel like the world is against you and others you find yourself supported to a degree that you never thought possible. The residence halls are an aggregate of unique people with unique experiences and beliefs. This is what makes living on campus such an amazing experience. There is no way to know what each day holds but as a gay man living here I do know where I can draw support from when the times are challenging and I know that attitudes are at the very least maturing.

Are there still individuals living on campus that hold strong homophobic beliefs and act on their behaviors? Yes, of course. Are those people outnumbered by those

that believe we all have a right to live safe lives in a supportive learning environment? I would strongly say that yes is my answer again. It is my belief that it is better to know what someone believes in order to better understand them. Discussions like those that have grown out of the feedback board can only serve to make it easier for understanding to happen. The residence halls are a place of growth and development with a make up that changes every year. This literal change makes the halls a new place to be every year. The potential seen today can become the challenge of tomorrow in the blink of an eye. To me, this prospect makes life on campus as an LGBT person exciting and that is the truth.

## Our Fictions and/as Realities

By Lesley Bogad

What does it mean to talk about the "realities" and "fictions" of GLBT issues? As I flip channels on my television these days, it isn't hard to find the fictions — *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, *Will and Grace*, *Queer as Folk*, *Boy Meets Boy*, or even the latest CNN news coverage about pending revisions to the laws forbidding LGBT people to marry in Massachusetts. And then there are the realities of friends, colleagues, students and family members whose LGBT lives are inevitably a little less rich, less thin, less glamorous, less consumption-driven than those delivered by the Fab Five. In spite of the glaring inconsistencies between the lives of television characters and our own, I can't help but wonder about the influence of this surge of LGBT themed programming on television. I find myself asking, is this a substantive shift in public awareness (even acceptance?) of LGBT issues, or is this just an odd blip on the radar? Is this a sign that things are "getting better," or is it just a precursor to a social and political backlash that could take us 10 steps backwards in spite of 5 steps ahead? What is the relationship between these fictions in popular culture and the reality of LGBT acceptance in our culture?

In his book *Media Matters* (University of Minnesota Press, 1994), John Fiske talks about the presidential election of 1992 between incumbents Bush-Quayle and challengers Clinton-Gore, and the role played by an unlikely television character named Murphy Brown. In the months preceding the presidential election, Dan Quayle gave a speech ("Restoring Basic Values," May 1992) in which he specifically cited Murphy Brown, a single mom played by Candice Bergen on a popular TV sit-com of the same name, as evidence of the lack of "family values" in the American culture. The press jumped on Quayle's criticism and publicized it widely. Come the season premier of *Murphy Brown* (Sept. 1992), the title character responded directly to Quayle's charges thus engaging in a prime-time media debate between a real vice-presidential candidate and a fictional sit-com character. As Fiske remarks, "Indeed it could be argued that Murphy Brown's baby was more directly influential in the social and political currents that put Bill Clinton in the White House than were the LA uprisings [post-Rodney King], or the confir-

# DAYS OF OUR LIVES

By Diane Martell

On a daily basis, gay and lesbian parents are faced with the task of serving as both positive role models for our children and as a bridge between our nontraditional families and the outside world. In our interactions with people and social institutions, we often take on the roles of educator, negotiator, and advocate, to ensure that ignorance and/or anxieties about LGBT people and culture does not create barriers in our children's lives. Below are some, "real life" situations that I have faced as the "cultural ambassador" for my family. I hope you will find them both humorous and enlightening.

## Second day of kindergarten:

The bus pulls up in front of the house and I walk up to it to welcome Julie home.

Me: "Hi sweetie! Where is your knapsack? On the seat? Go get it."

(To the driver) "How did she do today?"

Bus driver: "You're not her mother."

Me: "Yes. Yes, I am. Julie has two mothers."

*Uh-oh...she looks like she doesn't know what I am talking about.*

*... Free-floating anxiety.*

Bus driver: "Two mothers?"

Me: "Yes. You met Julie's other mother yesterday."

*You are embarrassing my child. Why don't you just let her off the bus?*

Bus driver: "I'm only supposed to let her go with a parent."

Me: "Yes. That's good. I'm glad you do that. I'm her mother, it's okay."

*You know you picked her up and dropped her off at this house yesterday. If I was a man standing here saying I was her father you wouldn't have even questioned me.*

Bus driver: "You're her mother?"

Julie: (anxious to get off the bus) "Mama! Mama!"

Me: "Yes. C'mon Julie, let's go."

## Prior to the Kindergarten Mother's Day Event:

Teacher: (very flustered) "I didn't know what to do about Julie for the Mother's Day event!"

Me: "What do you mean?"

*Be patient.*

Teacher: "All the children made a gift for their mom and then I remembered that there were two of you."

Me: "Yes, there are two of us."

*What is the problem? Why is this difficult for this teacher?*

Teacher: "So Julie needs to make a second gift."

Me: "Yes, she does."

*Seems like a no-brainer to me. Doesn't she realize that families come in all sorts of shapes and sizes? How does she handle the mother's day event for children from other types of nontraditional families? What about the children in class who have no mom... or the ones that live with their aunts or grandmothers, etc?*

4 Teacher: "Okay, well, that is what we'll do..... This is

all so new for me."

Me: "Yes. I know."

*No kidding.*

## In the First-Grade Classroom:

Other child: "You're Julie's mom?"

Me: "Yes."

Other child: "Is the other lady her aunt?"

Me: "No, she is Julie's other mom."

Other child: "Why does Julie have two moms?"

Me: "We are a family. Families are all different. Some kids have moms, some have dads, some have both moms and dads."

Other child: "Julie doesn't have a dad?"

Me: "No. Julie does have a dad. But he doesn't live with us."

*Why is this child so curious about Julie?*

Other child: "But why does Julie have two moms? Is the other lady your sister?"

Me: "No. We are both just Julie's mom."

*Hmmm. Sounds like some adult has been talking with this child about our family.*

Other child: "My mom says you must be sisters."

Me: Ah-hah, I knew it. "Nope. We are not sisters. We are both just moms."

Other child: "Julie was adopted?"

Me: "Yes, Julie was adopted by me and her other mom."

JULIE WALKS UP WITH ANOTHER FRIEND.

Other child: "Why did you adopt Julie?"

Me: (giving Julie a hug) "Because her other mom and I really wanted to be the moms of a really special little girl. And we were so lucky that we got Julie because she made our dream come true." *Julie looks embarrassed and upset by this girl's questions. I try to end the conversation and walk away.*

Other child: "Julie, you would have starved and died if you hadn't been adopted!"

Me: *ANGRY. What else is her mom saying to her!... Okay, it's not the kid's fault, though.*

"Don't be silly! That is not true. All kids get a family to love them and take care of them. Sometimes it is the family you are born into, and other times it is an adopted family. We were so lucky.... lots of families want to adopt children.... but we were the lucky ones who got Julie."

## At the Birthday Bowling Party (... and not in the best of moods):

Other mother: "My son is at Wonderland. They have a great after-school program. Where does Julie go after school?"

Me: "She's at home."

*Uh, oh. Here we go again. I am tired and cranky... really not in the mood to 'come out' to this woman... but it looks like that is where the conversation is heading... maybe I can change the subject...*

Other mother: "Do you have a babysitter come in?"

Me: "No. We don't need a babysitter." **LONG PAUSE**

*Oh for goodness sake... just come out to her! Who cares what she thinks.*

"Look....I have a partner who is a woman and she is Julie's other mother, okay? She stays home with Julie."

Other mother: "Um, well, yeah, I already knew that. I met Vera at the Valentine's Day Party. That's great she can be at home after school for Julie."

Me: *An ally! And I was so rude. Do I feel stupid or what...*

## Bogad, Continued from Pg. 3

mation of Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court” (Fiske, 2).

Similarly, I would suggest, the current representations of LGBT people and issues in popular culture have an influence on the realities of LGBT and straight people alike. These shows (and the media hoopla surrounding them) have brought LGBT issues into a public forum, and whether we might consider the portrayal of gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered people as positive, negative or neutral, these images offer the cultural context in which significant issues (such as the constitutionality of gay marriage) get debated and decided.

When we talk about the realities of LGBT people in the world, I would venture to say that the realities cannot be understood entirely without a look to these fictions.

While it is tempting to talk about whether these shows are “realistic” or not, or to dismiss them as a marketing ploy for a new target demographic, I think that the fictions about LGBT issues or experiences are an important part of the reality. While few of us live “real” lives commensurate with the wealth, humor and style of these fictional characters, we must pay attention to what is being said, who is doing the talking, and how the public is listening when it comes to LGBT issues. The reality is that when it comes time to elect a president, or choose curriculum materials “appropriate” for children, or even engage in casual conversations about LGBT issues, these fictions are influential and important.

If you want to read more about portrayals of GLBT issues in popular culture or about the relationship between “reality” and “representation,” consider the following:

Vito Russo, *Celuloid Closet* (book, or VHS/DVD)

Michael Wilke, [www.CommercialCloset.com](http://www.CommercialCloset.com)

John Fiske, *Media Matters*

## STRANGERS IN THE NIGHT: BUILDING COMMUNITY

*By Daniel Scott*

Community is hard to attain—harder than we imagine. Nowadays, there seems to be an eagerness to group people into “communities.” Perhaps, in reaction to growing cultural and social possibilities, we try harder to organize the world around us, and the need to name a “community” has become more urgent. In fact, it does not seem as if naming a community is associated with any particular political stance or perspective: friends and allies think in terms of a “community” just as much as detractors do; it is discussed just as much by people who would be in the community as by those who would not be. Community has become one of the great goals of modern life; apparently, community is required if progress is to be made. Yet, community is still very hard to attain.

While it is important to envision and design a path towards community, I would like to assert that there is another dimension of community to celebrate. Instead of thinking of community as a goal, it might be more useful

to think of community as a process. As we build community, let us not predetermine—either intentionally or unintentionally—the shape and scope of that community (or let others do it for us). We must have community, but it must always be open to conversation, to debate, to amendment.

The funny thing is that, no matter what group(s) of people you might be talking about, it is nearly impossible to reach a solid agreement on the definition of their community. And what’s even funnier, perhaps, is that I would not want to have it any other way. I think that community is more a matter of doing rather than being. It is a matter of striving rather than of attaining. It is a pulling together in order to keep the dialogue going. The goal is not to get to an answer, but to get to the place where understanding starts to happen. Yes, such an idea of community puts us at risk of instability and impermanence – but I think the risk is worth it, if it means that we take care to build a valid, multi-vocal, richly diverse community.

As Bell Hooks writes in her essay “Black Identity”:

Fluidity means that identities are constantly changing as we respond to circumstances in our families and communities of origin, and as we interact with a larger world. Only by privileging the reality of changing identity will we be able to engage a prophetic discourse about subjectivity that will be liberatory and transformative.

Identity and community—if they are to be valid—have to be in process, always changing. I know, it seems to be a contradiction: “ever-changing identity”? How can we both “be” and yet always be in the process of “becoming”? A notion of changing and fluid community would seem to go against the grain of our most commonly held ideas about identity. In general, we come to identity to rest, to luxuriate in self-esteem, to linger with those who are “like us”—to enjoy familiarity and affirmation. The same is true for community. But can we over-manage affirmation?

One spring I was in London. I decided one night to go to the city’s Gay/Lesbian Center. I had not looked at a listing of events but had decided to just drop in. I admit that my secret hope, as I entered the building, had been to have a nice chat over coffee (or would that be tea?) about modern poetry with a charming leather-man (named Clive or Nigel, of course). Instead, I found myself instantly caught up in the whirl and swirl of sequined dancers and feathered gowns. Frank Sinatra’s voice wafted over the smiling, perfumed crowd. It was Ballroom Dancing Night. And it was lovely.

While the evening did not turn out the way I had imagined it, my stumbling onto the ballroom dancers was delightful. I learned to fox-trot (a skill no self-respecting college professor should be without). And I developed a new appreciation for the sentimental songs of the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s.

The point I want to make here is that I would not have consciously chosen to go to a ballroom dancing event. I had not expected the sense of communion I felt as the dancers circled the floor waltzing to “Strangers in the Night”; that sense of communion found me. I think that the glory of identity and community lies in such happy accidents—luminous moments when we find ourselves in spite of ourselves. It is important to welcome accident and (apparent) contradiction as we build our communities. Sometimes, it’s good to leave your assumptions at the door. And be found

# Myths Held by Many Early Childhood Educators about Lesbian and Gay Headed Families Versus Today's Realities

By Elizabeth Rowell

**MYTH:** *There are no children from lesbian and gay families in our early childhood classrooms.*

**REALITY:** As approximately one tenth of the U. S. population is homosexual (U.S. Census 2000), early childhood educators should assume that there is a strongly likelihood that there are children in their classrooms who have gay or lesbian family members and friends or might someday understand that they themselves are homosexuals.

**MYTH:** *There's no anti-gay sentiment or prejudice in schools for young children because they don't notice differences in people.*

**REALITY:** Anti-Gay taunting can be heard from children as young as five in schools across the country and usually teachers do nothing to stop it (Baker 2002, Casper 1999). Although young harassers often don't know what words like "faggot" and "gay" mean, they have learned to think that these words can be used as "put downs". Children of lesbian and gay headed families often feel compelled to be "in the closet" about their parents for fear of rejection and for their own safety.

**MYTH:** *There's no prejudice against homosexuals in the early childhood school curricula and school materials.*

**REALITY:** The field of early childhood remains a last stronghold against the inclusion of gay issues (Casper 1999). Families with lesbian and gay parents are rarely mentioned in pre-graduate two settings or are found in classroom or school library collections. To not include their types of families in an explicit way in various parts of the curriculum and materials is to make children from gay and lesbian families feel invisible and/or ostracized.

**MYTH:** *If teachers include discussions about same sex parented families, and/or speak up against homophobic name calling, etc. they will be criticized by parents and/or administrators and lose their jobs.*

**REALITY:** Although the school's pre-existing environment can limit the level or extent of what is included, it does not prevent determined teachers from finding ways to make lesbian or gay headed families a part of their curriculum.

**MYTH:** *Reading gay friendly picture books to young children is teaching about sex.*

**REALITY:** Just as most children's picture books featuring heterosexual parents do not go into the more intimate parts of life, neither do the following books for young children that show same sex parented families doing things with their youngsters that are typical of other types of loving families. These books are available in the Rhode Island College Adams Library Reserve Collection for Dr. Rowell. Review these books and read some to young children or share them with teachers. Positive actions like these can help to destroy the damaging myths about lesbian and gay families.

## *A Book For The Youngest Listeners*

Arc-Dekker, T. *Bedtime for Baby Teddy*. \*Ridley Park, PA:

Two Lives Publishing.

This very lightweight cardboard book that shows two mummy teddies spending time with their baby bear would be delightful to read to infants and toddlers.

## *A Clever Read Aloud to Young Children Book That Encourages Participation*

Edmonds, B. (2000). *Mama eat ant, yuck!* Eugene, OR:

Hundredth Munchy Publications.

This book, told in rhyme with simple colorful illustrations, will have all listeners joining in with the title refrain. The story tells of how one of Emma's two moms eats an ant instead of a raisin and yells, "Yuck, Yuck, Yuck". The first and only words the child says for a very long time and in some very comical situations are "Mama eat ant, yuck!"

## *Alphabet And Concept Books For Prek-1st Graders*

Combs, B. (2000). *ABC: A family alphabet book*. Ridley Park, PA: Two Lives Publishing.

This cleverly illustrated alphabet book, with special words highlighted, shows multicultural gay and lesbian headed families, even one with a disability having fun together from A to Z in the following ways:

"C is for **cookies**. Both of my dads know how to make great chocolate chip **cookies**."

"**T** is **ice** cream. I like vanilla **ice** cream but my moms like chocolate best."

Combs, B. (2000). *123: A family counting book*. Ridley Park, PA: Two Lives Publishing.

In this delightful book, all of the full color paintings depict families headed by gays and lesbians. The children are exposed to counting from one to twenty with examples such as: two dads and their child playing with **13 balloons** and two moms and their three children wearing **5** funny hats on their heads.

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## A Long Way from Home: Struggles of LGBT or LGBT-perceived Youth

By Ellen Bigler

All Rhode Island College students in the Feinstein School of Education and Human Development take FNED 345, Diversity and the Public School. Essential components of the course include developing an awareness of factors that may interfere with diverse students' opportunities to succeed educationally, and encouraging students to become pro-active in changing those conditions. We know that societal responses to a student's sexual orientation may put that individual at risk; thus sexual orientation joins other factors examined in the course including among them race, class, gender, language, and ethnicity. While

there is a growing sense that life in recent years has become easier for LGBT individuals, or those perceived to be LGBT, an introductory exercise I ask students to participate in reveals how far we have to go as a society. I ask students to (anonymously) describe on a 5 x 8 card an incident of homophobic behavior that they have witnessed. Students' cards are then collected and redistributed to other classmates to read, ensuring the writer's anonymity. Typically every student in the classroom can describe incidents of homophobic behavior that they have witnessed. The collective impact of these incidents is sobering, underlining the vulnerable position of LGBT students. The descriptions range from name-calling to ostracism, from stereotyping to physical battering. Here are some of those collected incidents culled from a recent class.

*One of my mom's friends stopped coming over to our house because many of my mom's friends are gay.*

*(I was with a male who) saw two men eating together and started to make jokes about them.*

*I invited my friend \_\_\_ to come out for drinks with my other friends (all male). None of my other friends would agree to go out with me if \_\_\_ was coming, afraid they'd be seen as gay—afraid \_\_\_ would hit on them.*

*A couple related to my family had a baby and brought him to a family gathering. An openly gay male relative was holding the baby. The baby's father, who is openly homophobic, announced that he didn't want the gay male kissing his baby.*

*I have witnessed a person who was gay, but in the closet, around a large group of people who were telling "gay jokes." He became visibly uncomfortable but never said a word. He would even laugh slightly when the group looked at him.*

*I went to a Catholic private high school and there were a few openly gay people at my school. My senior year we had the ballots for "best" for the year book. There was a list of names of people under each subject like "best personality." A few people in the class wrote next to some of the openly gay people "because they are faggots." The school did not do anything about the comment...*

*My boyfriend and I at the time used to go on double dates with a lesbian couple. This one I can remember we went bowling. I never felt so uncomfortable. Everyone in the place stopped to look at the four of us. When we got to our lane the people in the lane next to us actually asked to move over one (lane).*

*I was at work in the restaurant and my two gay friends came in and sat at the bar. Two "straight" guys came in and sat at the bar. They were making crude remarks (intended to be overheard) about homosexuals.*

*My friend has been married to his wife for almost 15 years.... His wife's mother, two years ago, announced that she was gay. My friend instantly commented "What is my*

*side of the family going to think about having a 'lezbo' in the family." He then said almost in a scared tone "Oh my god, now my daughters are going to be gay."*

*In high school one of my friends was gay. Because she was gay she wasn't allowed to come to my house. My parents told her she was an abomination and that she will go to Hell.*

*I went to high school with a student that was gay.... There were times when people would call him a fag behind his back or write a note that said fag and leave it on his bag or car.*

*In Salem this past weekend a group of guy friends beat up two guys who were dressed as homosexuals for Halloween. They beat them until they were unconscious just because they looked gay.*

*When I was in high school there was a boy (who) was very good looking, smart and athletic. He was also gay. One day he got really beat up pretty bad. The school suspended those who did it but the school still denies that it was a "homophobic" fight.*

*The homophobic experience I can think of is my high school volleyball coach. One of my friends was having an off day and after hitting the ball into the net a couple of times the coach said to quit hitting the ball like a fag.*

*In a high school English class, whenever a certain kid would be picked to read out loud, several guys in the class would cough the word "gay" periodically throughout his reading. The teacher never said anything, I'm not sure if she didn't hear it, or just didn't get it.*

The exercise helps students to begin to name the problem, to explore how to end the silences that put LGBT youth at risk in our society. Last year Matthew Shephard's mother spoke at Providence College about the pain of losing her son to homophobia, and the dangers of individuals not speaking out against prejudice and discrimination in our society. Her message echoes the words of Margaret Mead: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever does."

## Same-Sex Marriage On The Web

The following web links may be helpful in keeping up with the latest news in regards to the legalization of same-sex marriage.

[Http://HRC.org](http://HRC.org)

[Http://millionformarriage.org](http://millionformarriage.org)

[Http://massequality.org](http://massequality.org)

[Http://www.nglhf.org/marriagecenter/index.cfm](http://www.nglhf.org/marriagecenter/index.cfm)

[Http://www.gayweddings.com/](http://www.gayweddings.com/)

[Http://www.sfgov.org/site/countyclerk\\_index.asp](http://www.sfgov.org/site/countyclerk_index.asp)

## Straight Talk From Mz. Direction

*Mz. Direction is the loving child of a dancing queen and a well known television personality. Her advice is by no means the final word on a topic in any other world but her own. She speaks from her heart and recently collagened lips. Holding a degree from the school of hard knocks, Mz. Direction will do her best to answer your "queeries."*



Dear Mz. Direction,

Today in the mail I received an invitation to my lesbian sister's wedding. Of course it seemed normal, listing where they are registered (Target, etc.) but I'm not sure what to do. Is this normal? Should I support it?

Signed,

Mixed-Up On Marriage

Dear Mixed-Up,

**I must say I agree with you. I also would not be willing to support a wedding registry at Target. Have you seen how cheaply sewn most of their couture is? ... What's that? Oh, upon second reading I see that you may actually be questioning the validity of your sister and her partner having a wedding and getting married. Gentle reader, really now, what do you object to? Two people being in love? Two people wanting to spend the rest of their lives together? Two people sharing a family and home? Two people wanting to know that they will be able to visit each other in the hospital in the case that one takes ill? Two people wanting the chance to publicly declare their dedication to each other? Two people wanting to partake in the over 1400 tax benefits afforded married couples? Seems to me your problem is with the fact that these two people happen to be women. To me, this is a non-issue and if your love for your sister is true, it will be a non-issue for you too.**

Dear Mz. Direction,

I have no problem with gays and lesbians having a civil union, or whatever, but marriage is about creating a family and procreation. We all know that two men cannot make a baby together. What would happen to our planet if we all just married same sex partners?? The human race would cease to exist! I can't wait to hear how you could justify that!

Signed,

Save Our Species

Dear SOS,

**Pardon my chuckle, but it seems you live under the delusion that allowing same-sex marriage will somehow nullify the existence of heterosexual marriages. So first I will clear that up, there will always be heterosexuals. Don't worry! As for your other concerns, many gays and lesbians are parents already. Let me say that again, many gays and lesbians are parents already. I am not going to detail the options one may select from in order to start a family because being a traditionalist, I feel procreation should best be discussed in the home. These options are also selected by many heterosexual couples also for reasons such as infertility and choice. Are their marriages not valid? Will some same-sex marriages not result in the raising of children? Of course. Do many heterosexual marriages not result in the raising of children? I believe the answer is yes here also.**

**As for our species facing extinction, I think the greater threat is the culture of fear, violence, and war that we are all too happy to perpetuate. I encourage you to also check out the world population statistics. So while many of your attitudes may seem Jurassic we are not going the way of the dinosaurs quite yet. Hope that isn't too disappointing dear!**

## Are You Out There?

Have you been reading "Out On Campus" regularly? Has anything piqued your interest or broadened your perspective on a particular topic? Do you enjoy knowing that this newsletter exists?

The Committee on LGBT Concerns is interested in hearing from you! We'd like to know if we have readers on campus and how you feel about our continued production of this newsletter. So if you can, please send us an email at the address below. You can share your thoughts and opinions or just say "Hi, I read the newsletter." Also, if you have any suggestions for ways we could better focus our efforts we would like to hear your opinions. Thank you!

**OutOnCampus@hotmail.com**

**8**

Out On Campus is produced to further the educational mission of Rhode Island College and support all members of our community. Direct all inquiries to our email address:

OutOnCampus@hotmail.com

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