

# ***Special Issues for Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Students***

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## **1. Self Esteem and Identity**

- Students face normal developmental tasks of developing identity with the additional stress of forging a positive gay, lesbian or bisexual identity.
- Self-esteem is affected by attempting to identify with a lifestyle that many view as disgusting, immoral, abnormal or immature.
- Many students face this struggle without the support of family or friends, fearing rejection if they "come out."
- "Passing" as heterosexual lowers self-esteem.

## **2. Religion and Spirituality**

- College is a time for questioning and exploring the role of religion in one's life.
- Many religious and spiritual traditions prohibit or sanction homosexual feelings or behavior.

## **3. Relationships and Intimacy**

- Gay, lesbian and bisexual students have a more difficult time identifying potential romantic partners because of fears of being "out."
- Gay, lesbian and bisexual students lack the institutional support for the development of relationships (e.g., school sponsored dances and social events, fraternity/sorority functions).
- Relationships are under more stress because they are often hidden, and the persons involved may be at different points in their identity development as gay, lesbian or bisexual.

## **4. Academic and Career Issues**

- Academic progress can be affected by the stress and social isolation often experienced by gay, lesbian and bisexual students.
- Societal attitudes sometimes limit career choices for gay, lesbian and bisexual students who want to be open about their lifestyle in the workplace (e.g., school teachers).
- Geographic considerations may be more salient for gay, lesbian and bisexual students who need to locate near an established gay, lesbian or bisexual community.

## ***Developmental Process for Gay Women and Men***

A 1977 Study of Professional Men and Women

*(Adapted from APA Board of Social and Ethical Responsibility. November 1977.*

*"Removing the Stigma." APA Monitor.)*

<b>Developmental Task</b>	<b>Average Age</b>	
	<b>Lesbians</b>	<b>Gay Men</b>
Awareness of homosexual feelings	13.8	12.8
First same-sex sexual experience	19.9	14.9
Understand what "homosexual" is	15.6	17.2
Had first homosexual relationship	22.8	21.9
Considered self "homosexual"	23.2	21.1
Acquired positive "gay" identity	29.7	28.5
Disclosed identity to spouse	26.7	33.3
Disclosed identity to friend(s)	28.2	28.0
Disclosed identity to parent	30.2	28.0
Disclosed identity professionally	32.4	31.2