

Our Stories, Our Voices: The Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project

Discussion Questions for Old (and Older) Lesbians

1. Did a particular story especially stand out to you? Why?
2. List descriptors that you thought of when you heard or read the term “old lesbian” BEFORE you saw this DVD. Are those descriptors different AFTER seeing the DVD?
3. What feelings did you have when you heard words on the DVD such as, “The gift of my lesbianism is a blessing, not a curse.” Or when Betsy wrote to her daughter, “In my young life then, I didn’t have a name for my feelings or any clue as to what it was about. IT didn’t exist...”
4. Do you have family or friends who are LGBTQ? Have you talked with them about what their lives are/have been like as “old” or “young” LGBTQs?
5. If you aren’t already out to them, how could you share your sexual identity with a friend or family member? What would help you to begin such disclosure?
6. How might an old lesbian who feels isolated put the subject of her sexual identity on the table? What might reduce her anxiety/fear?
7. How do you feel about the concept of, “Why bring up the subject at all?”
8. Other issues for discussion include realities that some old (and young) lesbians were disowned by families, suffered conversion/reparative therapy, were trapped in hetero-sexual marriages, lost custody of their children, lost jobs, were denied promotions, or dealt with suicide.

Suggested Actions for Old (and Older) Lesbians

1. Talk with one friend or family member about approaches you could take to coming out.
2. Role play such an interaction with a friend, either an old lesbian or a heterosexual person.
3. Attend a PFLAG (formerly known as Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) meeting.
4. Watch for, and make use of, opportunities to share your experiences.

*LGBTQ: Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Questioning/Queer

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Discussion Questions for Care Providers of Old (and Older) Lesbians

1. What feelings did you have when you heard the old lesbians' own words on the DVD?
2. Did a particular story especially stand out to you? Explain.
3. List descriptors that you thought of when you heard or read the term "old lesbian" BEFORE you saw this DVD. Are those descriptors different after seeing the DVD?
4. Do you have family, friends or colleagues who are LGBTQ? Have you talked with them about what their lives are/have been like as "old" or "young" LGBTQs?
5. What do you need to feel more comfortable, competent, and welcoming to LGBT clients?
6. What experiences have you had with exclusion or difference?
7. Does your workplace offer cultural sensitivity training for staff? Does the program include LGBTQ diversity?
8. Does your cultural sensitivity program at school or work address your clients' LGBTQ and aging issues?
9. How might you start a conversation with a client/patient whom you perceive to be an old lesbian? How might you respond if the client does not engage in the conversation?
10. Other issues for discussion include realities that some old (and young) lesbians were disowned by families, suffered conversion/reparative therapy, were trapped in heterosexual marriages, lost custody of their children, lost jobs, were denied promotions, or dealt with suicide.

Suggested Actions for Care Providers to Old (and Older) Lesbians

1. Attend a PFLAG (formerly known as Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) meeting.
2. Talk about the subject with your administration, asking to participate in LGBTQ cultural sensitivity trainings if they are available.
3. Role play with colleagues, a supportive, affirming conversation with a woman you perceive to be a closeted old lesbian.
4. Gently start the conversation with a client who you feel might be an old lesbian, and be affirming.

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Discussion Questions for the General Public, Senior Centers, Places of Worship, Organizations

1. Think of a situation where you felt isolated or different from the rest of the group. What was that like for you? How would you like to have been treated?
2. What feelings did you have when you heard the old lesbians' own words on the DVD?
3. Did a particular story especially stand out to you? Explain.
4. List descriptors that you thought of when you heard or read the term "old lesbian" BEFORE you saw this DVD. Are those descriptors different after seeing the DVD?
5. Do you have family, friends or colleagues who are LGBTQ*? Have you talked with them about what their lives are/have been like as "old" or "young" LGBTQs?
6. If your senior center, church or organization offers cultural sensitivity training, does the program include LGBTQ diversity?
7. Are there considerations that you perceive as barriers to discussions of LGBTQ issues at this church/temple or organization?
8. Other issues for discussion include realities that some old (and young) lesbians were disowned by families, suffered conversion/reparative therapy, were trapped in heterosexual marriages, lost custody of their children, lost jobs, were denied promotions, or dealt with suicide.

Suggested Actions for the General Public, Senior Centers, Places of Worship, Organizations

1. Seek out and participate in events that are likely to increase your awareness and cultural sensitivity to LGBTQ issues.
2. Attend a PFLAG (formerly known as Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) meeting.

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Additional Discussion Questions

Below are additional questions that may assist closeted, isolated Old Lesbians to enter into conversations about their lives.

- A. Tell me if you have (or had) a special woman in your life?
- B. What qualities did (or do) you value about her? How did you and she first meet? (Fun hearing those stories!)
- C. How open were you able to be with your friends, to let them know how special you two were/are to each other?
- D. What messages did you get when growing up? Did you ever feel pressure to walk more like a lady, or keep your knees together when you're seated? Did you feel pressure to date guys? To marry and have children? How did you feel about trying to fit into the heterosexual box?
- E. What challenges did you encounter along your way, such as non-acceptance, discrimination or shaming – with family, jobs, or your church or temple? Can you reflect and share about such instances in your life... perhaps the toughest one you had to deal with?
- F. Have you experienced internalized homophobia – self-hatred or self-loathing – because of being lesbian, bi, gay or trans?
- G. What experiences of others are you aware of, and how have they affected you?
- H. Do you have friends or family who have gone totally into the closet because of religion, family pressure, employment, or housing?
- I. Is there a term or label that you have used and DO feel comfortable with to describe yourself about your being a woman-loving-woman (WLW)? And are there some terms you do NOT like for yourself or for anyone? How do you feel about each of these terms: Gay, Lesbian, Queer, Dyke, Butch, Femme, Bulldagger, Lipstick Lesbian. Others?
- J. At what point in your life did you recognize that you wanted to have your closest connections/relationships be with other women – even with all of the accompanying risks and pain? What have been your greatest successes on this journey of being who you really are?
- K. What friends or family members have you felt particularly safe with – in confiding your feelings for women?
- L. Are there individuals in your life to whom you will NEVER come out – it's just not worth the energy? (Do weigh the pro's and con's in every case!)

- M. Is there one – or maybe two or more – person(s) – you DO still want to come out to in this lifetime? Have a “baby steps” plan?
- N. What place do gay or lesbian friends or social groups play in your life now? How satisfied are you with that? How would you like to change it?
- O. Would you like to be OUT (as lesbian or LGBTQ) more or less? A lot more? Somewhat more? Less? Not at all?
- P. How has the legalization of marriage affected your life now?
- Q. How have the changes in public attitudes toward gays and lesbians affected you personally?
- R. How can we all set the words “old” and “lesbian or gay or trans” on the dinner table or address them in the senior center? In this way we are helping old lesbians (including ourselves) feel accepted, comfortable, and welcomed as exactly – wholly – who we are – not some shadowy figures half-way hidden in darkness, guilt and low self-esteem.

Additional Discussion Questions For Care Providers to Old (and Older) Lesbians, General Public, Senior Centers, Places of Worship, Organizations

- S. What cultural sensitivity trainings related to old LGBTQs do you make available at your site?
- DVD *Our Stories, Our Voices: The Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project*.
 - Professional films such as *Cloudburst* and *Edie and Thea*.
- T. Do you have other programming specifically related to old (and older) lesbians?
- U. What books or DVDs are in your library that relate to LGBTQ issues – perhaps to better understand a peer who is LGBTQ or a teen granddaughter who is identifying as lesbian.

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