

# spotlight

newsletter

Counseling and Personal Development Center, Westchester Campus • Fall 2008

## Other Voices: Spotlight on LGBT Student Issues

**C**OLLEGE IS A TIME when students learn a great deal about who they are, who they want to become, and what kinds of experiences they wish to have. For many students, this means exploring and questioning their sexuality and/or gender and perhaps even identifying themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT). “Coming out” can be an emotionally charged time punctuated by numerous transitions and changes. While it is not uncommon for individuals to experience stress during this time, it is also an exciting period, rich with possibility.

What follows is a primer on LGBT student concerns, including helpful listings, answers to some frequently asked questions, and historical information. Have you ever heard a term like “questioning” or “bicurious” and wanted to know what it meant? Do you want to find a local discussion group for LGBT individuals? Are you curious about the experiences of other LGBT students? If the answers to these questions are yes, read on.

As you explore this newsletter, you will learn about the top physical and emotional health concerns for LGBT students. A staff and a student will share their perspectives on LGBT student life at Pace University—what they feel it is like now and how it can improve. Along the way, we will provide information about important events in LGBT history, as well as listings for local resources, recommended reading, and a glossary of terms.

This is just the tip of the iceberg. Remember, you can always visit the Counseling Center if you ever feel that you need support in learning more about who you are. Keep an open heart, and stay true to yourself.

—Joseph Manera, PsyD  
Post Doctoral Fellow



### A Gathering of Many Voices

**T**HE GAY-STRAIGHT ALLIANCE (GSA) meets weekly during the academic year and is a safe place for students of all sexual orientations to discuss issues relating to sexuality. To get involved, contact the 2008–2009 Gay-Straight Alliance President Jake Knisely at [sevenosevenjake13@yahoo.com](mailto:sevenosevenjake13@yahoo.com).

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# Recommended Reading

**A GOOD BOOK CAN EDUCATE**, entertain, inspire, and reflect and affirm one's own experiences. Below is just a sample of books about the experiences of LGBT people.

## Fiction

*Rubyfruit Jungle* by Rita Mae Brown

*Stone Butch Blues* by Leslie Feinberg

*Angels in America* by Tony Kushner

*Tales of the City* by Armistead Maupin

*Funny Boy* by Shyam Selvadurai

*Loving Her* by Ann Allen Shockley

*The World of Normal Boys* by K.M. Soehnlein

*The Man Who Fell in Love with the Moon* by Tom Spanbauer

*Valencia* by Michelle Tea

*Tipping the Velvet* by Sarah Waters

*A Boy's Own Story* by Edmund White

*Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* by Jeanette Winterson

## Non-fiction

*Before Night Falls* by Reinaldo Arenas

*Bi America: Myths, Truths, and Struggles of an Invisible Community* by William Bursleson, ed.

*Stonewall* by Martin Duberman

*Surpassing the Love of Men* by Lillian Faderman

*Freedom in This Village: Black Gay Men's Writing 1969 to the Present* by Lynn Harris, ed. — Forty-seven black gay males write about who they are and the world in which they live

*GLBTQ: The Survival Guide for Queer and Questioning Teens* by Kelly Huegel — Guide for teens discussing various aspects of sexual and gender identity

*Bi Any Other Name: Bisexual People Speak Out* by Loraine Hutchins and Lani Kaahumanu, eds. — Bisexual individuals write about coming out, community, politics, and their own experiences

*The Full Spectrum: A New Generation of Writing About Gay, Lesbian, Transgender, Questioning, and Other Identities* by David Levithan and Billy Merrell, eds. — Forty contributors, each under the age of 23, write about sexual identity

*In Search of Gay America* by Neil Miller

*Becoming a Man* by Paul Monette

*And the Band Played On* by Randy Shilts

*How to be a Happy Lesbian: A Coming Out Guide* by Tracey Stevens and Katherine Wunder



*The Transgender Reader* by Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle, eds. — Writings about transgender identities, including history and first-person accounts

*Why Marriage Matters: America, Equality, and Gay People's Right to Marry* by Evan Wolfson — Nationally renowned attorney hails the movement for marriage equality

## Did You Know? (Part Two)

**T**HE STONEWALL RIOTS are considered to be a watershed moment in LGBT history. Why?

The Stonewall Riots were a series of violent conflicts between LGBT people and New York City police officers that began during a June 28, 1969 police raid at the Stonewall Inn, a bar in the West Village. Up to and including the 1960s, law enforcement raids on gay bars were a regular part of gay life in cities across the United States, with police sometimes recording the identities of those present at the raid and providing the information to newspapers for publication. The Stonewall conflicts lasted several days, with a crowd of 400 protesters. LGBT people had never before acted together in such large numbers to forcibly resist police harassment directed towards their community.



# Top Ten Physical and Emotional Health Concerns of LGBT students

**IN COLLEGE,** LGBT students are in a unique position, undergoing numerous transitions in their lives—moving away from home, academic challenges, making new friends—while also exploring issues around their sexuality. It is common for LGBT college students to experience a range of feelings during this time in their lives. Below are their top ten physical and emotional health concerns.

**1 Access, Comfort, and Trust**—It is important to feel welcomed and supported on campus, whether you are in the Admissions Office, the Counseling Center, or a faculty member's office. LGBT students notice and appreciate when programming is directed toward and/or involves them and when policies on discrimination are in place to protect their rights.

**2 Coming Out**—Many LGBT students “come out” at college, contemplating, discovering, accepting, and revealing to others their sexual orientation or gender identity. There is no correct way to come out. Coming out is an ongoing process of decision-making. LGBT individuals are always weighing the risks versus benefits of publicly identifying oneself as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender.

**3 Healing from Oppression**—Experiencing anti-LGBT discrimination, violence, and hate can lead to physical and mental health problems. Even in the absence of experiences of overt discrimination, LGBT students are at risk of feeling negative social attitudes.

**4 Coping with Stress, Anxiety, and Depression**—Gay and bisexual men and women are more likely to experience depression and anxiety than are their heterosexual counterparts. These emotions might include intense sadness, anxiety, loneliness, discomfort in social situations, and feeling overwhelmed.

**5 Surviving Suicidal Thoughts, Plans, or Attempts**—Decades of research have consistently documented a link between LGBT youth and suicide (thoughts, plans, and/or attempts). College students who report having gender traits more often associated with the other sex appear to be at greater risk for suicidal symptoms, regardless of sexual orientation.

**6 Sexual Health Concerns**—Rates of gonorrhea, chlamydia, and syphilis have increased in the populations of men who have sex with men. Despite myths that sex between women carries no risks, women can transmit HPV, herpes, hepatitis A, hepatitis B, gonorrhea, and chlamydia when having sex with other women.

**7 HIV/AIDS**—Rates of new HIV infection among men who have sex with men have recently increased after thirteen years of decreasing. In 2007, 61% of HIV diagnoses in men came from men who have sex with men.

**8 Smoking**—The tobacco industry aggressively advertises toward LGBT communities. Over 43% of young gay men and lesbians ages 18–24 smoke, in comparison to 17% in the rest of the population.

**9 Drinking and Other Drug Use**—Twenty to 25% of gay men and lesbians are heavy alcohol users. Greater marijuana and cocaine use has been found in lesbians than in heterosexual women. Gay and bisexual men are more likely than their heterosexual counterparts to have used or be addicted to a range of drugs, including marijuana, sedatives, cocaine, ecstasy, ketamine, and GHB.

**10 Body Image**—Bisexual and lesbian women's experience of body image can be complicated. Women in the gay community might reject concerns about weight, which can be detrimental to their physical health. Gay and bisexual men may struggle to achieve an exaggerated sense of male beauty, as they are often expected to be fit, muscular, and impeccably dressed.

*Source: The Advocate College Guide for LGBT Students  
by Shane L. Windmeyer*

## COUNSELING AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT CENTER

All Counseling Center services are free of charge and confidential.

### Westchester Campus

Administration Center, 2nd Floor  
Pleasantville, NY 10570  
(914) 773-3710

Monday—Friday  
9:00 a.m.—5:00 p.m.

Preston Building, 3rd floor  
White Plains, NY 10603  
(by appointment only)

**In case of an emergency when the Counseling Centers are closed:**

Westchester students may contact  
a 24-hour crisis hotline at (914) 347-6400.



# A Student Voice

Rebecca Aaron-Albanese '08 was the president of the Gay-Straight Alliance at Pace University in Pleasantville during the 2007–2008 academic year. The Spotlight Newsletter asked Rebecca how she would describe the atmosphere and attitudes at Pace regarding LGBT students.

**I F I HAD TO DESCRIBE** the current climate at Pace University in Pleasantville towards LGBT students, I would portray it as lacking. Students that I have spoken with often question why I do not agree that Pace is a “gay-friendly school.”

Numerous times throughout the school year, I have heard Pace University students saying “that’s so gay.” “this is gay,” or “that person is gay.” When I ask them why they use this word in such a context, I rarely hear a satisfactory response. The individual might say, “I didn’t mean it in that way.” He or she will often state a very good reason for why

they do not consider themselves to be homophobic. I find this to be incredibly confusing. How can someone use a term that a group of people use to identify themselves, frame it in a negative context, and not understand how it is offensive?

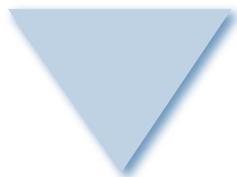
In order for Pace University to become gay friendly, we need to be more aware of the words we use and the context in which we use them. What can we do to fix this? It starts internally. Students need to speak up when homophobic remarks are heard, and faculty members need to educate students to be accepting and not tolerate hatred. If we can at least make the effort to stop one offensive comment or initiate one productive classroom discussion, then all hope is not lost.

## Did You Know? (Part One)

**MOST OF US ARE FAMILIAR** with the image of a pink triangle, which has become synonymous with the gay community. But do you know this symbol’s historical context and what it symbolizes?

During World War II, the Nazis targeted gay men and lesbians as well as Jewish people, racial minorities, and others. Hitler revised Paragraph 175, a clause in German law prohibiting homosexual relations, to include same-sex thoughts, kissing, embracing, and gay sexual acts. In the concentration camps, each persecuted group was forced to wear an insignia to mark them as a member of a particular group. The pink triangle identified gay men.

Some have taken this symbol of discrimination and oppression and turned it into a symbol of pride and incentive for change. The insignia was commonly used throughout the early gay liberation movements, and it serves as a powerful reminder to continue working for justice in the present.



# A Staff Voice

James Stenerson, PhD, has been at Pace for over 30 years—first as a student, and then as staff at the Center for Teaching. He is currently an adviser to the Gay-Straight Alliance. Stenerson spoke with the Spotlight Newsletter about his experiences as an advocate for LGBT student causes at Pace University and his advice for students.

**Tell us a little bit about your involvement with LGBT causes at Pace.**

I have been at Pace for over 30 years and have always been supportive of various LGBT events in Pleasantville. These events are usually built around Coming Out Day in October, AIDS Awareness Day, and a spring event. Unfortunately, for the longest time, Pleasantville did not sustain a LGBT Group. Currently, we do have an active Gay-Straight Alliance club. I am one of the co-advisers for the group.

I introduced the Domestic Partnerships policy to the University. When I did so, there were some tense moments. Luckily, the administration adopted Domestic Partnerships and I know a few people who have filed (including my partner and me). Over the years, I attempted to organize different discussion groups so the Pace community could be exposed to different issues facing the LGBT students. In the fall semester, I will be teaching a Queer Studies course. This will be the first time the course is offered in Pleasantville.

**How would you say the attitude regarding LGBT students has changed at Pace since you’ve been here?**

Over the years, there have been a number of openly gay/lesbian faculty and staff who want to offer support to the LGBT students. In fact, many of the events in the past had faculty and staff organizers who outnumbered the students. I think this may have been intimidating for the few students who showed up for events. Over the past two years with GSA, there has been a change where the students now organize and run the events. This is a great thing and I hope it continues.

In general, I believe the culture in Pleasantville changed for the good when Pace created a Campus Diversity Director position and appointed Shanelle Henry Robinson to the position. Shanelle has done a great job working with students, staff, and faculty and also spreading the word about the Safe-Zone Program, which is a training program designed to increase the overall campus community’s understanding and awareness of issues faced by LGBT individuals.

**What do you see as some of the challenges facing LGBT students at Pace?**

The biggest challenge I have heard about is that there is not much of a social network for the LGBT students. There are few clubs or social happenings in Westchester County. The primary reason for this is that Pleasantville is located so near to New York City. I always hope that more LGBT venues would open in Westchester but there is still a void.

**What do you wish to see in the future regarding support for LGBT students at Pace?**

A viable, strong and well-enrolled Gay-Straight Alliance. If this happens, I firmly believe that LGBT students would feel more secure on campus. We would have a larger presence and be known by more students, especially the commuter students. I think some LGBT students have the wrong impression that the Westchester campus is a closeted environment. It’s not!

**What advice do you have for LGBT students?**

Support the GSA by becoming an active member. For those students who are questioning or who are not out, please look for the staff and faculty who have the Safe-Zone plaque. We are here to help you and want you to feel welcomed and know you are supported. We should be a proud community standing in unison.

# Glossary

**Ally**—A non-lesbian, gay man, or bisexual whose attitudes and behaviors work towards combating homophobia and heterosexism.

**Bicurious**—A person who is curious about their degree of bisexuality.

**Bisexual**—A person who is sexually attracted to both men and women or to a set of qualities that do not necessarily line up with biological sex.

**Come out**—To publicly affirm one's homosexual identity, sometimes to one person in conversation, sometimes by an act that places one in the public eye. It is not a single event, but rather a lifelong process.

**“Down low”**—Men who discreetly have sex with other men while in sexual relationships with women are said to be on the “down low.” Often these men do not consider themselves gay or bisexual.

**Dyke**—A derogatory slur for lesbians. Reclaimed by some as a term of pride.

**FTM (Female-to-male)**—A person born or assigned at birth as biologically female, who identifies as a male and who takes the sex, gender, and identity of a male through dress, mannerisms, behavior, hormone therapy, and/or surgery.

**Gay**—Used to describe people whose enduring physical, romantic, emotional, and/or spiritual attractions are to people of the same sex. In contemporary contexts; “Lesbian” is often a preferred term for women.

**Gender Identity**—The gender that a person sees themselves as. This can include refusing to label oneself with a gender.

**Heterosexual privilege**—The benefits granted automatically to heterosexual people that are denied to gay men and lesbians.

**Homophobia**—A fear and hatred of LGBT individuals based on a lack of knowledge and cultural conditioning. It is also manifested as a fear of being or being perceived as gay, or the fear of one's own attraction to the same gender.

**Internalized Homophobia**—The process by which a member of the LGBT community comes to accept and live out inaccurate, disparaging myths and stereotypes about LGBT persons.

**Lesbian**—A woman who has emotional, social, psychological, and physical commitments and responses to other women.

**MTF (Male-to-female)**—A person born or assigned at birth as biologically male who identifies as female and takes the sex, gender, and identity of a female through dress, mannerisms, behaviors, hormone therapy, and/or surgery.

**Outing**—Disclosing someone's sexual orientation or gender identity without permission.

**Queer**—Once a derogatory term, the word “queer” has been embraced by the GLBT community and is used as an umbrella term for all sexual minorities.

**Questioning**—Being unsure of one's sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

**Sexual Orientation or Identity**—Emotional, physical, and/or sexual attraction to others, which may be towards the same sex (homosexual), the other sex (heterosexual), or both sexes (bisexual).

**Transgender**—Refers to persons whose self-perception as male or female is different than their biological sex and who live full-time as the other sex.

# Resource Guide

The following is a list of resources for LGBT students in Westchester and NYC, including health care centers, social and support groups, activism opportunities, and more.

Get involved!

## Westchester/Rockland County:

**AIDS-Related Community Services**—Solely dedicated to providing HIV/AIDS services to people in the Hudson Valley Region. Provides free, confidential testing. Spanish speaking counselors are available. For more information, call (914) 785-8287.

**CANDLE Youth Pride Triangles**—A confidential group for young adults (ages 18–23) who want to discuss sexual orientation, gender identity, and transitioning to adulthood. Weekly meetings in Rockland County. For more information, call Jeanmarie at (845) 429-5731.

**Center Lane**—A community center for LGBT adolescents ages 14–21 living in and around Westchester County. Offers a drop-in center, discussion forums, workshops, activities, and trips. For more information, call (914) 761-0600.

**Gateway Program at Westchester Medical Center**—A mental health program serving the LGBT communities of the Hudson Valley. Services include individual, family, and group psychotherapy. For more information, contact Donna Festa, LCSW at (914) 493-1753.

**The Loft: LGBT Community Services Center**—A not-for-profit community-based organization serving the LGBT community of the Lower Hudson Valley. Home to twenty groups and programs, including a youth group and game nights. For more information, call (914) 948-2932.

**Lambda Peer Support Services**—Provides workshops, discussion and in-focus groups, holiday activities, and other programs to the LGBT community of Westchester and surrounding areas. A Coming Out group is offered. For more information, call (914) 514-3220.

**Rainbow Alliance of Westchester**—Offers support and education for members of the LGBT community. For more information, call (914) 517-1345.

**PFLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) Westchester County**—Offers support for parents, families, and friends of LGBT persons to understand and accept their LGBT children, family members, or friends. For more information, call (914) 245-8236 or (914) 948-2487.

**T.O.U.C.H.**—Offers individual counseling, substance abuse peer support groups, and food delivery to those living with HIV/AIDS in Rockland County. For more information, call (845) 268-8023.

**Westchester County Health Department**—Maintains listings of HIV testing sites throughout the county.

For more information, call (914) 813-5256.

**Westchester Lesbian Connection**—Promotes events for women in a safe space focusing on social, recreational, educational, and theatrical activities. For more information, call (914) 517-5455.

**Westchester's Health Department's 24-Hour HIV Information Line**—(914) 995-9595

## New York City:

**Callen-Lorde Community Health Center**—New York City's only primary health care center dedicated to meeting the health care needs of the LGBT communities regardless of a patient's ability to pay. For more information, call (212) 271-7200.

**Gay Men's Health Crisis**—Provides individual and group therapy, walk-in counseling, and other services to members of the LGBT community living with HIV/AIDS. For more information, call (212) 367-1000.

**The New York City Gay & Lesbian Anti-Violence Project**—Serves LGBT victims of violence by providing free and confidential services. For more information, call (212) 714-1184.

**NYC Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Center**—Provides social service, public policy, and cultural and recreational programs, with over 300 group meetings a week. For more information, call (212) 620-7310.

**Marriage Equality New York**—Advocacy group aiming to secure the freedom and right of same-sex couples to legally marry. Volunteer opportunities available. For more information, call (877) 772-0089.

## Other Useful LGBT Contacts:

**Gay and Lesbian Switchboard of NY**—Provides peer counseling and information services. For more information, call (212) 989-0999.

**Gay and Lesbian National Hotline**—Free and confidential assistance on issues ranging from coming out, relationships, HIV/AIDS, and safer sex. For more information, call (888) 843-4564.

**The Gay Yellow Pages**—Links to a variety of resources. For more information, visit <http://www.gayyellowpages.com>.

**Human Rights Campaign**—Advocacy group providing a national voice on GLBT issues. Works to advance equality based on sexual orientation and gender expression and identity. For more information, visit <http://www.hrc.org>.