

To our  
**Allies:**  
**Everything**  
you ever wanted to know  
about **Lesbian,**  
**Gay, Bisexual**  
and **Trans** Issues.....

*Well, maybe not everything...*



Canadian Labour Congress

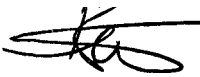
Congrès du travail du Canada

**The** Canadian labour movement stands in solidarity with the struggles of LGBT communities across the country. This alliance has resulted in an impressive record of victories for LGBT rights at work, in the legal arena and within our own trade union movement.

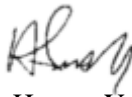
While Canadian unions have a solid record of support, we know that much remains to be done - in particular we must work hard to win legal protection for trans people under our human rights laws and collective agreement rights at work.

This “Allies” booklet will be a useful tool in our ongoing work to educate ourselves and each other about LGBT realities and to strengthen our resolve to create a truly equal society which celebrates and embraces all of its members.

In solidarity and pride,



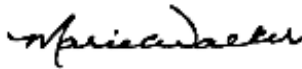
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Standing up for human rights and the rights of workers is fundamental to what we do and who we are as trade unions – an injury to one is an injury to all. Our credibility and our solidarity depend on it. We need our lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans members to know that the union belongs to them as much as it belongs to anyone. We need non-unionized LGBT workers to see that unions are a viable way of making change in their workplaces and society. And, we need our own members to recognize that diversity makes us stronger, more creative, and more able to challenge employers and government.

This booklet is intended to provide some ‘basic answers to basic questions’ that our lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) members are routinely asked, as well as responses to questions that aren’t asked, but perhaps our allies would like some answers to. Contents include definitions of terms used in the LGBT community, information about basic bargaining and workplace issues, suggestions for allies, and basic responses to questions about same-sex marriage, trans issues, LGBT families, etc. There isn’t necessarily consensus within the LGBT community about everything in this booklet, but we’ve tried to present a range of views.

The LGBT community within the union movement relies on our allies to make our workplaces and our union safe and respectful. In turn, we contribute to building our unions and being part of the broader movement for social justice that includes all of us.

## Frequently Asked Questions:

**“Why are some people gay<sup>1</sup>? Is it genetic? Is it choice?”**

There are different points of view about the origins of sexual orientation. Some people believe sexual orientation is established early in life; others decide their place later, after many different life experiences. Some people arrive at their sexual orientation without making conscious choices; others do make conscious choices, and still others ‘just fall in love’. These views are not mutually exclusive. If you’re heterosexual, is that something you decided, or just always knew about yourself?

Too often, when people are looking for the ‘cause of homosexuality’, what they are really looking for is a cure for homosexuality. Gays and lesbians aren’t in need of a cure for anything other than homophobia and heterosexism (stay tuned for the definition of heterosexism). We’d do well to ask the question “what causes homophobia” – because that’s what we need a cure for.

One way of thinking about sexuality is on a continuum (a range or a scale). Some people believe very strongly that they belong at one or the other ends of the continuum (gay or straight). Studies suggest that most people, however, fall somewhere along the continuum. This doesn’t mean that all of these people are actively bisexual - although repeated studies do show that approximately 15% of the American population<sup>2</sup> is actively bisexual, with 1/3 of all American men reported to have had a sexual experience with another man at some point in their lives.

**“What about the gay gene? What about the crooked 3<sup>rd</sup> finger on your left hand?”**

Some people – straight and gay – find the idea of a ‘gay gene’ comforting – it says “they/we can’t help it; it’s not their/our fault”. The trouble with this line of thinking is that it reinforces the idea that being gay or lesbian is a problem, it’s an aberration, it’s not normal, and that “clearly, nobody would actually want to be gay or lesbian....” So, on this basis, we get tolerance, sometimes even pity. That’s not the same as acceptance, celebration, or true equality.

<sup>1</sup>The term ‘gay’ is used in this booklet to include gay men and lesbians, because lots of people still say this. However, it is not considered an inclusive term by many lesbians, so we actually prefer the terms ‘gay men and lesbians’. Some people use the term ‘lesbian women’, but this seems a bit redundant...

<sup>2</sup>Major studies with reliable data are American (including the groundbreaking Kinsey report), but one can reasonably assume similar statistics apply in Canada.

Whether or not you believe genetics plays a role (see above, and see below), LGBT people do not want to be accepted 'in spite of' being gay, nor do we want sympathy for being gay. Being gay (or lesbian, bi, trans), is just as rewarding and legitimate a way to live as being straight.

Genetics or the gay gene, gets a lot of attention in the media. It's worth asking why. In the past, so-called scientific research has included attempts to 'prove' people of colour aren't as smart as white people and Asians (by measuring the circumference of their heads), and attempts to 'prove' that women are not as smart as men because of a difference in the size of their cortex, etc. It's a shame that geneticists are funded for research that perpetuates stereotypes, and so little time and money is devoted to issues like researching cancer-causing substances in the workplace. We always need to ask ourselves: WHY is this research being undertaken - what is the purpose behind this study? Clearly, it is not just scientific curiosity. The purpose of finding the gay gene is so that it can be isolated, so that fetuses carrying the gay gene can be aborted, and so that those who are gay or lesbian can have gene therapy and be 'cured'. This is akin to ethnic cleansing. It is deeply offensive.

**"I want to know more, but I don't want to offend anyone with my questions."**

Sure, some questions are offensive, but mostly you'll find that LGBT people would rather be talked to, than whispered about, and will give frank answers. Just check yourself - are you asking because you're simply curious or because you think that an answer would help you be a stronger ally? If you're not sure about your question, say that you'd like to be told if you're crossing the line into stuff that's too personal.

Another way to think about what's appropriate is to flip your question around: would you feel comfortable answering it? How well would you need to know the person asking? For example, what do you think caused your heterosexuality? When and how did you first decide you were a heterosexual? What was your first heterosexual experience like? Is it possible your heterosexuality is just a phase you might grow out of? Do your children have different fathers? Do you worry that you're making life difficult for your kids? What's your sex life like? What are you into? Chances are you don't get asked these questions, but we do. So, if you can stick to what you feel you need to know, you're probably not crossing the line.

**“If so many people admit in surveys that they are probably not exclusively gay or lesbian or heterosexual, how come there aren’t more people who are actively bisexual?”**

Until very recently, our culture has been defined almost exclusively in terms of heterosexual norms. We are taught (at school, at home, through advertising, religion, etc.) that the only normal sexual activity or relationships are heterosexual ones. These are pretty pervasive and powerful messages.

For the record, a bisexual person is simply someone who is open to having a relationship with either a man or a woman.

**“What exactly is homophobia?”**

Clinically, it refers to a fear and hatred of gays and lesbians. Homophobia ranges from derogatory comments, to harassment, to violence (gaybashing), to silencing (‘as long as they don’t talk about it’, etc.) to denial of human rights. Homophobia is also described as the fear of feeling love for members of one’s own sex, and therefore the hatred of those feelings in others.

Because we’re all immersed in a culture that can be pretty homophobic, most lesbians, gay men and bisexuals have had to deal with our own internalized homophobia. We need to shake off any feelings of inferiority or shame, and we need to expect to be treated equally, and not be ‘grateful’ when we don’t experience rejection or hatred.

**“What does heterosexism mean?”**

It is the assumption that everyone wants to be, or is involved in, an opposite sex relationship. This assumption includes the belief that heterosexual relationships are superior to lesbian and gay relationships. This assumption is part of a system that continues to legally, socially and economically discriminate against lesbians, homosexuals and bisexuals. It is the assumption behind innocent questions like: “So, is your daughter married?” or “What does your husband do?” It is inclusion of ‘partners of the opposite sex’ in definitions of spouse. Heterosexism is part of what makes it difficult for gays, lesbians and bisexuals to talk about our lives over coffee or in the cafeteria — there isn’t any room in the conversation. Heteronormativity (now there’s a mouthful) refers

to the way that heterosexuality is treated by our culture as the only normal way of loving. It includes (but isn't limited to!) silly questions to six year old girls about who their boyfriend is...

### **"Why 'pride'?"**

Most people grow up being taught/told to be ashamed of at least some aspect of ourselves and our lives. That's especially true for LGBT people, and all those who aren't part of the dominant culture. Throwing off this shame and learning to be proud is at the heart of pride movements.

### **"What's the symbolism of the rainbow or the black and pink triangle?"**

The rainbow has been a symbol of LGBT pride since the 1970s. The colours are intended to symbolize our diversity.

The historical significance of the black and pink triangles dates back to the 1930s when the Nazis launched a campaign to persecute lesbians and gays. The Nazis used down-turned triangles, black for lesbians and pink for gay men, as identification markers in concentration camps.

In the 1970s, gay and lesbian liberation groups reclaimed these triangles as reminders of past oppression. During the 1980s, a number of AIDS activists and coalition groups turned the pink triangle upward to signify an active fight-back campaign. Whichever way the triangles are displayed, they have become symbols of pride and solidarity.

### **"Is homosexuality a North American / Western phenomenon?"**

There is nothing new, and nothing particularly Western, about homosexual activity, or about transgender/transsexuality. The fact that there have been laws against homosexual activity (including cross-dressing) since the earliest recorded times tells us that homosexual activity is at least as old as the laws that have banned it (they wouldn't be making up laws if there weren't people transgressing them!). Likewise, there have been societies that have historically accepted homosexuality – for example in Ancient Greece, and in many Aboriginal cultures (where the term 'two-spirited' is sometimes used).

It's amazing that something that has been a part of our world culture throughout the ages continues to be misunderstood, misrepresented, and 'hidden'.

Men who have sex with men, women who have sex with women, and trans people live in every country of the world – we may not use the terms lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans (in fact many languages don't have words - or at least not respectful ones - for LGBT people), but that doesn't mean we don't exist. When you hear people say "they don't exist in my culture / country", you can take from that the homophobia and transphobia is so strong that there is little or no recognition of the existence of an LGBT community – not that there isn't one. When you hear white people in the LGBT people saying that "there just aren't many LGBT people of colour" – that's a willful excuse for not reaching out and making connections.

In 2006 large scale pride parades were held in locations throughout Central and South America, Southeast Asia, Africa, Europe, the former Soviet Union, and North America. We're everywhere.

**"Can you tell if someone's gay just by how they walk/ talk / act / etc.?"**

Nobody likes to be stereotyped. When people ask this question, they are usually suggesting that if a man acts "feminine", or a woman acts "masculine", it means they are gay or lesbian. What needs to be challenged here are rigid notions of what it means to be male and female (so men can only act a certain way, and women a certain way? How outdated!) Interestingly, when men act in ways that are considered feminine, they are usually the object of ridicule – which says a lot about how little our culture values women. . .

If someone is gay-bashed for acting outside of what's considered "normal male behaviour", or "normal female behaviour", the homophobia is based on rigid gender roles, not on sexual orientation. Therefore, if we are going to fight homophobia, we must also fight sexism.

**"How do you know if you're gay or lesbian or bisexual?"**

Relax, the odd dream doesn't mean anything... Most people who are lesbian or gay would agree that we can't but be who we are



which means it's just that clear to us and our lives don't make sense any other way. Having said that, sometimes it takes a while to figure this out!

Bisexuality is similar, only it's more situational – which is to say that people who identify as bisexual are more open to (and aware of) falling in love / lust with members of either sex.

Some people want to know “how can you know that you're gay/lesbian if you haven't tried heterosexual sex?” - but they're not so comfortable with the question in reverse...

**“Why are people so threatened by gays and lesbians, and by trans people?”**

Nobody ever really asks this question (!), but we know that LGBT issues can really shake people up...:

Lesbians experience homophobia in part because they challenge the so-called fundamental dynamic between men and women. They're not available to men. The belief that men are entitled to women simply reflects a patriarchal society – and hypersexualizes lesbians.

Some gay men experience homophobia in part because they upset the norms of gender expression.

Transgender people and transsexuals experience transphobia in part because they upset for others their deeply held ideas about gender identity, gender expression, and biology.

**“I don't know what language to use – is it okay for me to say 'fag', 'queer', 'dyke'? I hear my friends in the LGBT community use those words...”**

Language is a powerful tool – its impact is often related to who is using it and for what purpose. With time, many people in the gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans movement reclaimed the language and began using it. In this way, they took the power of the words, and made it theirs. Not all LGBT people today feel comfortable using these words; some people in the community (particularly older people) still feel they are discriminatory and hateful. In most contexts outside of the gay, lesbian, bisexual community, words like: queer, dyke, faggot, etc., are still intended as derogatory, hurtful, insulting. For this reason, people should be extremely

careful about using these words, unless you yourself are part of the community. Whatever your intentions, you may be misunderstood.

A lot of people in the LGBT community have adopted the use of the word queer because it is more encompassing and more inclusive and less cumbersome than LGBT or LGBTTTTIQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, two-spirited, intersex, queer). It's also a little punchy. However, the same caution still applies – unless you can be sure that you are understood to be an ally to everyone in earshot, steer clear of it.

A dictionary of terms is at the end of this booklet.

**“People talk about special rights – that’s not the same as equality, right?”**

Gays, lesbians, bisexuals and trans people aren't asking for special rights. We are asking for an end to discrimination. It's only in the last five years that employers in Canada can no longer legally pay lesbian and gay employees less than their heterosexual counterparts (prior to this, unless it was specifically negotiated for same-sex couples, only heterosexual employees had benefit and pension coverage for their partners).

Trans people certainly aren't asking for anything 'special' either – a safe place to work, a safe washroom / changeroom (just like everyone else has), the right to be called by their name, the right to accommodation (that we all have), and the right to be referred to by their chosen gender.

**“Why doesn't everyone just come out?”**

National Coming Out Day is October 11<sup>th</sup>. The idea is that if more of us came out, then more people would realize that it turns out that people they know and like and respect and love are LGBT. This would result in a 'speeding up' of societal acceptance.

But coming out isn't something that we do once – it's practically a daily process. Every time our kids get a new teacher, whenever we negotiate with the bank, whenever we get a new doctor, whenever we meet a new co-worker, whenever we run into someone from high school, whenever we cross the border ...we make a decision about whether to come out. And for those of us who don't easily 'pass' as straight or as our chosen gender, we're still coming out, it's just got a bit of added stress because we have less control over

the timing. Coming out isn't always traumatic, but it's not always easy. Sometimes it's a relief, but it can be scary and it can be tiresome.

Being accepted is a pretty basic human need – none of us wants to risk that. And so, we make strategic decisions about whether, when, where and how far we're going to come out to our families and communities. We balance all sorts of factors – and sometimes those factors include our need to maintain our support systems even at the cost of not being out, or officially 'out'. For example, for those of us who aren't part of the dominant white culture, it could mean we risk losing ties with our support systems that help us deal with the daily realities of racism. And, for others of us, coming out could mean we risk losing band support, or losing our faith community – that might be too big a trade-off. (None of this implies that homophobia is any more prevalent in Aboriginal communities, specific ethno-cultural communities, or even faith-based communities than it is generally. It simply means that there are added risks to coming out that some of us face and others don't).

By the way, we may have told you that we are gay, lesbian, trans or bisexual, but don't assume that we have chosen to share this with others. Just because we're 'out' in one situation, doesn't mean we're 'out' in another. Please don't 'out' us. Respect our right to make these decisions and declarations on our own.

### **"What's gender identity<sup>3</sup>?"**

We'll talk about that in a minute. For starters, let's talk about biology.

*Biological sex* includes external genitalia, internal reproductive structures, chromosomes, hormone levels, and secondary sex characteristics (for example, breasts, facial and body hair). These characteristics are objective: they can be seen and measured.

Surprising to some, the scale consists not just of two categories (male and female) but is actually a continuum. Most people exist somewhere near one end or the other. The space more in the middle is occupied by intersex people (formerly called hermaphrodites). This space in the middle is also occupied by transsexuals who are in the process of sex re-assignment.

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3. The following definitions are based on work produced by the Center for Gender Sanity.

*Gender identity*, on the other hand, is how people think of themselves and identify in terms of sex (man, woman, boy, girl). Gender identity is a psychological quality. Unlike biological sex, it can't be observed or measured, only reported by the individual.

Like biological sex, it consists of more than two categories, and there's space in the middle for those who identify as a third sex / gender, both, or neither. We lack language for this middle space because everyone in our culture is supposed to identify completely with one of the two extreme categories.

In fact, many people feel that they have masculine and feminine aspects of their psyches, and some people, fearing that they do, seek to purge themselves of one or the other by acting in exaggerated stereotyped ways.

Intersex: People who are born intersex have combinations of characteristics typical of males and those typical of females, such as both a testis and an ovary, or XY chromosomes (the usual male pattern) and a vagina. Or they may have features that are not completely male or completely female. One in 2000 babies are considered intersex.

### **What's gender expression?"**

Gender expression is everything that we do to communicate our sex/gender to others. For example, the type of clothing we wear, our hair styles, mannerisms, the way we speak, the roles we take in interactions, etc.

Gender expression is a continuum, with feminine at one end and masculine at the other. In between are gender expressions that are androgynous (neither masculine nor feminine) and those that combine elements of the two (sometimes called gender bending).

Sometimes we communicate our gender expression purposefully, sometimes it's accidental. Our gender expression could be forced on us as children, or by dress codes at school or at work.

Gender expression can vary for an individual from day to day or in different situations, but most people can identify a range on the scale where they feel the most comfortable. Some people are comfortable with a wider range of gender expression than others.

### **“What’s sexual orientation?”**

Sexual orientation indicates who we are erotically attracted to / want to be intimate with. The ends of this scale are labelled “attracted to women” and “attracted to men”. In the mid-range is bisexuality. There are also people who are asexual (attracted to neither men nor women).

We tend to think of most people as being either solely attracted to men, or solely attracted to women (whether they are gay or straight). However, studies show that most people are in fact not at one extreme of this continuum or the other, but occupy some position in between.

Some people assume that you can tell someone’s sexual orientation by their gender expression (i.e. women who act and dress in androgynous ways must be lesbians, men who are comfortable with what’s considered feminine must be gay, etc.) – you can’t; and besides that, none of us likes to be pigeon-holed.

### **“What’s trans?”**

Trans (or transgender) is used as an “umbrella” term to describe a wide range of identities and experiences, including - but not limited to - pre-operative, post-operative, and non-operative transsexual people<sup>4</sup>; male and female cross-dressers (sometimes referred to as “transvestites,” “drag queens” or “drag kings”); intersex individuals; and men and women, regardless of sexual orientation, whose appearance or characteristics are perceived to be gender atypical.

Other current synonyms for trans include “gender variant,” “gender different,” and “gender non-conforming”. While there are no accurate statistics, it is estimated that 1 in 11,900 males and 1 in 30,400 females identify as trans. These stats likely under-represent the number of trans individuals, since so many keep their identities secret.

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4. Not all transsexuals use the term ‘transgender’. If you’re interested in the politics of this distinction, see Vivan Nameste’s book: *Sex Change, Social Change*. And, some folks use the term trans-identified rather than transgender. You may have also come across the letters LGBTTTTIQQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, two-spirited, intersex, queer, questioning) - which should tell you that language is pretty important to us, and we don’t necessarily all want to be lumped together. And yes, we know it’s a bit cumbersome.

*“It should be noted that each of these groups has distinct issues in relation to discrimination in society... The term ‘transgender’ is, in effect, a form of shorthand that refers to a wide range of people and experiences. However, it is important not to allow the use of a single term to imply that their needs are identical or that their human rights issues are all the same.”*

*Ontario Human Rights Commission “Toward a Commission Policy on Gender Identity”  
Discussion Paper, October 1999*

**Transition** is the process of changing sex, including hormones, cross living (living according to gender identity, not biology), and surgery. A practical minimum duration for this process is about two years but it is not unusual for it to take longer.

**Transphobia** is the unrealistic or irrational fear and hatred of cross-dressers, transsexuals and transgender people. Like all prejudices, it is based on negative stereotypes and misconceptions that are then used to justify and support hatred, discrimination, harassment and violence toward trans people.

### **“What are sex reassignment surgeries?”**

SRS refers to medical procedures by which an individual undergoes surgeries to create the physical appearance of the opposite sex. Approximately 1 in 30,000 adult men and 1 in 100,000 adult women seek sex reassignment surgery. Not all trans people seek surgery.

One of Ontario Premier Mike Harris’ first acts of office was to de-list SRS – saving Ontario taxpayers a whopping \$110,000 a year (out of a multi-billion dollar health care budget) and putting trans people in limbo – many partway through SRS that they cannot now afford to complete<sup>5</sup>. This mean-spirited attack has not been corrected by the Liberal government, despite indications that they had intended to re-list SRS. As a union movement we are calling for the re-listing of all de-listed health care services, including the re-listing of SRS.

<sup>5</sup> In 2007 the Ontario Supreme Court ruled in favour of three trans people who fought the de-listing on human rights grounds. While they won their cases, the ruling did not apply to others in the same situation, nor did it compel the Liberal government to re-list SRS.

**“I get the whole gay thing, but the trans stuff is taking it too far.”**

Whenever a new fight against oppression emerges, some people have conflicting feelings. They know that a struggle against any form of bigotry and discrimination is ultimately good for everyone. But they feel anxious about how those changes will affect their own lives and identities.

There are some lesbians and gay men who fear that their “winnable” demands for legislative reforms or acceptance will be lost if they stand up for the rights of trans people. “Let us win our demands first,” they plead, “and then your demands will be more easily won later on....That’s a trickle-down theory of reform. But those who have been trickled on in the past are not so impressed with that strategy.”

**“Why go through the whole trans thing – why not just become a lesbian or a gay man instead of changing your whole body?”**

Many people wrongly assume that transexuality and sexual orientation are linked (e.g., if someone has a sex change, it is so that they can be with someone of the - now - opposite sex. This may, or may not be the result, but it is unlikely to be the motivating factor). The reasons that people have a sex change are to do with who they feel they themselves are, and not to do with who they want to have a relationship with.

Some trans people enter into same-sex relationships after transition, while others seek opposite sex relationships. Some maintain their relationships from prior to transition, others don’t.

**“How do unions address key issues for LGBT workers?”**

**Harassment:** LGBT union members – and anyone else perceived to be LGBT — are routinely harassed in the workplace . . . this ranges from being the target of whisper campaigns, to graffiti, to sexual harassment, to physical violence. None of it is acceptable and all of it is an affront to human dignity and union solidarity. Anti-harassment policies with speedy confidential follow-up, and anti-harassment training (with LGBT content), are needed.

**Discrimination:** We need to bargain and uphold provisions to protect LGBT members from discriminatory attitudes on the part of management (including stereotypes governing decisions about hiring, transfers, skills & abilities, etc.)

**Benefits:** We need to bargain benefits that understand realities of LGBT members and our families and ensure that benefits are not exclusionary, but rather that they are equal.

**Uniforms:** We need to negotiate uniform policies that give us real choices that we feel comfortable with (gender neutral, and appropriate in fit).

**Union building:** We need to work toward the inclusion of LGBT members at all levels within our unions (this means confronting homophobia within the union and supporting our LGBT brothers and sisters who seek union positions).

**“Can religion be used as a reason for a shop steward to refuse to represent an LGBT member?”**

In short, no. A union is not a religious organization. We have a legal responsibility to represent all of our members, including lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans members. We have a legal duty to represent; to do less would be considered arbitrary, discriminatory and in bad faith. Furthermore, we stand for the principles ‘An injury to one is an injury to all’, and ‘United we stand, divided we fall’. As trade unionists, we don’t believe in ‘equality for some’.

It’s important to note that while a number of major religions have historically supported (and been involved in) the murder, torture, exclusion, ‘conversion’ of gays, lesbians and trans people, that is not true of all religions or of all faith groups. Many religions and faith groups these days are struggling hard to come to terms with issues of sexuality, and have become much more inclusive.

**“ Can religion be used as a reason for a justice of the peace or court official to refuse to provide a marriage license?”**

Public servants do not have the right to discriminate in their duties and the role of justices of the peace is to perform marriages. There are still some jurisdictions where this question is unresolved. Stay tuned.



In 2006 the Conservatives floated the idea of a “Defense of Religions Act”, that would have allowed religion to be used in this way; they backed off under public pressure. Taken to extreme, it could give teachers the right to refuse to teach out gay students, and so on. In Minnesota a bus driver recently won the right to refuse to drive buses with gay-positive advertising, but her union, Amalgamated Transit Union Local 1005 is on record in opposition to the court’s decision.

**“Is there a link between gay men and pedophilia?”**

Groan – we hate this assumption, but we’d like to set the record straight.

It’s estimated that one in four girls is sexually assaulted and one in ten boys. These numbers are staggering and the cost to our children and to society is immeasurable. But let’s be clear – the vast, vast majority of child molesters are heterosexual men – and even the men who abuse boys usually consider themselves heterosexual. We better be prepared to ask ourselves: “is it safe to expose our children to heterosexual teachers and day care workers?”, if we’re going to question the motives of the lesbian and gay people who are devoted to caring for kids.

**“Do lesbians really hate men?”**

First of all, most lesbians want to be with women because that’s who they’re attracted to – it’s not actually about men...

The vast, vast majority of lesbians have lots of male friends (in fact, some of our best friends are men...). For the most part, we have great relationships with our dads, with our sons, with our brothers, co-workers, neighbours, etc. (assuming they haven’t cut us off because we’re lesbians). Of course, like all women, we’ve also had our share of difficult relationships with men, and some of it’s been abusive (as above). For most of us, that didn’t ‘turn us into lesbians’ – if sexual abuse turned women into lesbians, the lesbian population would be a lot higher than it is, truth be told. Do some of us feel more comfortable with other women? Sure – but that’s not ‘conversion’ – that’s about attraction and interest.

Of course to those who think: ‘she just hasn’t met the right guy’ – we say “that’s just ugly, offensive, and egotistical. Get over it.”

**“Should gay people be allowed to have children?”**

Can you imagine one group of people deciding that another group of people should or shouldn't be able to have kids? How would you feel if someone said you shouldn't have kids, even though they knew practically nothing about you?

And yet, that's exactly what has happened historically, when there were laws right here in North America banning mixed-race couples from having children, there were doctors sterilizing people with disabilities (without their consent) and laws in China dictating one-child only families. . .

For what it's worth, most lesbian and gay men need to go to an awful lot more trouble to produce children than the vast majority of heterosexual couples, so you can be very sure that the children we have are wanted, and that due and careful consideration has gone into their making. According to the American Psychiatric Association, there is not a shred of evidence that having lesbian or gay parents has negative impacts on child development.

What is harmful to the children of gay and lesbian parents is homophobia. And that is something, like poverty, that we as a society need to address. Children of gay and lesbian parents need the hate to stop.

**“How do lesbians and gays get children?”**

Heterosexuals really paved the way for us on this one, with sperm banks and surrogacy. Some lesbians use anonymous donors (we say donors, not fathers – a father is someone who raises a kid), others have known donors (who in a few instances might be called dad, but more likely have an important but non-parental role in the child's life). Some gay men work with women who act as surrogates (again, the men are the parents, the woman is a surrogate). Lots and lots of lesbians and gay men have children from prior heterosexual relationships. Other lesbians and gay men adopt children / babies. Reproductive rights and reproductive choice are at once straightforward and complicated. At the end of the day, our kids are planned and wanted.

**“What are the chances that children of same-sex parents will themselves grow up to be gay, lesbian or bisexual?”**

So far, the studies show that we've got about as much ability as parents to influence our kids' sexuality as we do to get them to floss.

**“What about three-parent families – should that be allowed?”**

Lots of kids are raised by one parent, lots more by two parents, and a growing number by three or four parents through step-parenting – and that's all within a heterosexual context. When two lesbians and a gay man in Ontario wanted to have their family legally recognized, then the fuss really began... At the end of the day, this is about a child's right to family recognition and about formalizing parental obligations, so that if one parent dies, the duties and roles of the remaining parents are clear. The court case of the family we just mentioned set an important legal precedent, but it did not create a new law. Parents who wish to register as three-parent families will still need to go to court and will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

**“How do I talk to my kids about gay people?”**

Be straightforward, and use the correct language (for example, 'gay men and lesbians' – rather than 'gay people'). And, you could try this: “10% of the population is left-handed, 10% have red hair, 10% have blue eyes, and 10% are lesbian or gay. That's just the way it is.”

**“The pride parade seems pretty excessive – is that kind of show really necessary?”**

The pride parade is a massive demonstration of collective power. It is one day of the year where LGBT activists can walk together without fear of violence, harassment, or abuse. A day where we hold hands in public, and yes, even kiss. A day where our bodies, which are repressed, closeted, denied and shamed, are actually celebrated. A day where we fight back against electric shock therapy, bigoted employers, hostile co-workers, AIDS/HIV discrimination, disease and death, tremendously high suicide rates and smear campaigns. A day when trans people, who

fought on the frontlines at Stonewall and who are still among the most marginalized in our society - including within the LGBT community - are admired s/heroes. A day when the poverty experienced by many in our community who are denied jobs, or fired, or harassed into quitting must be recognized. A day when the police, who regularly bash, intimidate, and turn a blind eye when members of our community are harassed and murdered, have to stand on the sidelines and witness our power. A day, unlike any other day, where we are not isolated, where we are the dominant culture. This is the kind of power that is transformative and can only come through collective action. That's tremendously political and tremendously powerful. Is what's shown on tv representative of who's at the parade, or what goes on there? No, darling, only the fabulous people ever make it on tv.

Our fightback is creative, it is fun, and it's loud (in every sense). It doesn't look like any other demonstration. Perhaps that's partly why we're able to attract a million people to Toronto Pride every year, and get so much attention in cities across the country. Wouldn't it be great if Labour Parades drew these crowds

**“How does our involvement on LGBT issues – not to mention the pride parade - affect our credibility?”**

Carrying a union banner in a Pride Parade actually gives our unions some credibility with the 10% of society excluded by most other groups. We could sure use that support. That's what coalition building is about.

The top leadership of our labour movement has taken up LGBT issues with courage and conviction. We have LGBT members across the country who are now saying “my union” for the first time. And, the 10% of our overall Canadian population that identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans, recognizes the union movement's role.

Unions are acknowledged as major players in the fight for LGBT rights. Nowhere in the world have unions pushed as hard as they have in Canada, and consequently LGBT Canadians have more rights than citizens of nearly every other country in the world. We belong at pride because we're leaders.

Some union leaders feel that it's risky politically to support LGBT members. It's true, it won't win an election, but again, we need to trust in our overall principles. Human rights and social change have never been popular where they challenge attitudes and actions. Some people fear speaking out on LGBT issues will make people wonder if they're gay too. It's a shame that people's own insecurity about their sexuality gets in the way of doing the right thing.

**"Do all gays and lesbians support equal marriage?"**

All gays and lesbians support equality. Not all of us want to get married – after all, we already know our relationships are legitimate. Some of us are interested in legal recognition, others of us aren't. Some of us live in so-called traditional monogamous relationships, and some of us opt for more creative arrangements. That doesn't mean we want society to start separating us into good gays and bad gays...

Some of us view marriage as a patriarchal institution (where women become property of men), some of us view it as a heterosexual institution (so why rush down that aisle?), some of us are disappointed that we were forced to take on this fight (gay liberation was supposed to model new and different and multiple ways of being in relationships). Still others of us have been dreaming of our special day since Ken first kissed Ken.

But whether or not each of us is interested in marriage for ourselves, we are no longer willing to be denied the choice.

In some ways, it's funny that the right wing wasn't more open to gay marriage – after all, presumably we're less of a threat if we're all nicely coupled off. Instead LGBT people get blamed for the demise of marriage (when half of all hetero marriages end in divorce?) – that's a bit far-fetched, no?

**"What was labour's position on same-sex marriage?"**

The CLC and all major unions took a strong stand in support of equal marriage. The Canadian Labour Congress was a founding member of Canadians for Equal Marriage and worked in this coalition through both stages of the equal marriage campaign. Union leaders from across the country wrote and lobbied both Prime Ministers and Members of Parliament and supported the coalition work with generous donations.

At the CLC Convention in 2005, over 2000 elected delegates unanimously endorsed a resolution calling on the Government of Canada to pass the equal marriage legislation. We know there is widespread support among trade unionists for this equality measure.

Unions have been vocal and persistent in our defense of human rights. For us, the defense of equal, civil marriage rights falls squarely within this tradition.

### **“Was marriage the last ‘equality’ hurdle?”**

Let’s see – homosexuality was decriminalized in 1969 (Pierre Trudeau’s famous line: “the state has no place in the bedrooms of the nation”). In 1977 Quebec laws were amended to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation; in 1986 Ontario amended its laws; in 1992 BC followed suit, and in 1995 the Canadian Human Rights Act was finally amended to prohibit discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation (it became illegal to discriminate in employment or refuse to rent someone an apartment, or provide a service to someone based on sexuality). Then there’s pop culture: a few years ago Ellen DeGeneres came out on television and more and more gay-content became mainstream. It used to be that every LGBT character on screen ended up dead, but now some of us are survivors... More and more people have come out of the closet, some religions are supportive of their LGBT members, lesbian and gay couples can now adopt, unions have changed attitudes and bargained for equality, same-sex benefits are now the law, and equal marriage legislation has passed in Canada (2005).

But, gays, lesbians, bisexuals and particularly trans people still risk rejection from our families, friends and co-workers; LGBT youth are still kicked out of our homes; the suicide rate for LGBT youth is double the national average; trans people still don’t have explicit human rights codes protection; bashing and murder still happen with alarming frequency; there are still homophobic slurs, transphobic violence, and harassment in the workplace, etc.

### **“Why are trans issues union issues?”**

Thanks to some courageous ‘out’ trans members, our union leaders and members are becoming increasingly educated on trans issues in the workplace and the community.

As trade unionists we have core principles. We believe in everyone's right to dignity on the job. We believe in everyone's right to a safe and healthy workplace. We believe in workplaces free from harassment and discrimination. We believe in negotiating wages and benefits for all of our members. We believe our employers should not have access to, or dictate, our private lives. We believe in using our power to strengthen minority rights. We believe that an injury to one is an injury to all.

Sure, the issues around transgender and transsexuality are challenging for most of us (as they are for those of us who are trans). But as we struggle to come to terms with challenges to traditionally established notions of gender, we still know what's right from wrong.

We know it's wrong for employers to fire people based on personal characteristics. We know it's wrong when one of our members is afraid to come to work for fear of co-worker harassment and violence. We know it's wrong when employers deny one of our members access to benefits while providing it to others. We know it's wrong when any member faces ridicule on the job. We know it's wrong when employers leak private information about us. We know it's wrong when one of our members is afraid to turn to the union for help, for fear of being rejected. We know it's wrong when the majority stands silently by and watches a member suffer.

Unions have a legal and moral responsibility to defend all members. Unions have a demonstrated history of defending and bargaining for minority workers. Unions have the social weight to help embattled minorities win legal protections. Trans workers are workers, trade unionists and part of our movement.

**"What's the employers' responsibility on trans issues?"**

Employers are legally responsible for providing a harassment-free workplace. Too often supervisors and co-workers taunt, isolate, verbally and physically abuse trans individuals; supervisors and co-workers refuse to refer to trans people by the name and by the pronoun of their choice. This is harassment.

Employers are not permitted to discriminate on the basis of gender in hiring, training or promoting trans workers. They cannot fire

trans employees when we transition or come out (i.e. let people know that we're trans). And, employers have a legal duty to accommodate workers - employees who are in transition need access to time off work for medical procedures. Trans workers must be given access to appropriate washrooms, uniforms, dress code, etc. during and after transition. Privacy must be respected and confidentiality maintained. Employers need to cooperate by changing records for pension coverage, medical and health plans, EI, CPP etc., to reflect trans workers' new gender identity. Employers should provide medical coverage for all de-listed health services, including transition costs and transition-related expenses, and should not deny access to private health care benefits to trans workers that are available to other members with other medical needs.

*As trans activist Courtney Sharp says, "Employers who want to find solutions have found solutions. Those who do not want to find solutions tend to use the issue as an excuse to terminate the employee." "Sure, [people] worry about the bathroom question." But we told them, "listen, everyone has to go to the bathroom. . .but if you're worried about what's between someone's legs - you're the one who is being inappropriate." In the end, trans workers must have access to safe and dignified bathroom facilities.*

### **"What can the union movement do?"**

Our unions have a responsibility to defend all members on the job. The collective agreement is one critical tool. Enforcing the collective agreement and defending trans workers makes the tool effective. We should add the words "gender identity" and "gender expression" to our non-discrimination language. We should negotiate benefit coverage for the medical treatments required for transition. Trans people are not only being denied public health care for transition related expenses, but are sometimes denied access to private health care benefits that are available to other members. Anti-harassment training should include harassment based on gender identity as well as homophobia.

And, we need to make it clear to employers that the union will

<sup>9</sup>The British Columbia Human Rights Tribunal found that a union discriminated against a transsexual member by failing to properly represent her. The Tribunal ordered the union to pay her \$5,000 for injury to dignity, plus lost wages.



defend any attempts to discriminate against trans workers<sup>6</sup>.

We need to make it clear to our trans members that their contribution to the union is important and we want their voices heard.

It is illegal to discriminate against trans people in Canada, but our human rights laws should say so explicitly. Unions can join the push to have gender identity and gender expression written into legislation.

Unions play a very important role in helping to shape public opinion, in lobbying governments and in working with social justice groups. We are in the leadership of the women's movement, the movements to defend health care and social services, the fight for equality for lesbian and gay citizens among others. Our movement can use the skills and knowledge we have developed in these campaigns to help further the struggle of trans people for equality and dignity.

### **"Is HIV/AIDS still a gay issue?"**

Let's be clear: it is within the heterosexual community that HIV/AIDS is spreading the fastest – both in Canada and internationally. HIV/AIDS is not the 'gay disease' it was considered to be in the 1980s. However, gay men, "men who have sex with men" but don't consider themselves gay, trans people, lesbians, and bisexuals are, of course, still at risk of HIV/AIDS.

Gay men with HIV/AIDS (and for that matter, gay men who are still often assumed to be HIV positive just by virtue of being gay), face a double stigma. Harassment, marginalization, fear of being outed, discriminatory treatment by insurance companies and health care providers – these are just part of what it means to be queer and HIV positive. Trans people who are HIV positive face discrimination whichever way they turn, as treatment providers may not see them as 'fitting' neatly within their programs. Even within the LGBT community, HIV positive lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and trans people can still face the stigma of AIDS. That said, we have a strong tradition and culture of caring for people with HIV/AIDS, something that heterosexual communities could learn from.

For too long, HIV/AIDS was not taken seriously in North America by most politicians, health care professionals, and practicing heterosexuals, because it was seen as simply a gay disease. This

meant it did not get the funding or educational programming that would have saved lives.

In the global context, homophobia plays out differently – the disease tends to be discussed as if it only affects heterosexuals! Prevention and education programs deal only with heterosexual sex, and treatment and support programs often have a clear heterosexual bias. This is especially true in countries where LGBT rights are few and homophobia is sanctioned. Here, the challenge is to ensure that homophobia doesn't stop LGBT people from getting relevant information and equal access to treatment and community and government support.

Tragically, religion has played a major role in spreading the pandemic, as many major religions refuse to address HIV/AIDS preferring instead to throw stones at its victims, or stay silent as it ravages the globe. Silence = death. Politicians, fearful of challenging right-wing fundamentalist voters, do so little. Stephen Lewis, UN Special Envoy on HIV/AIDS, has gone so far to label their inaction "criminal".

The LGBT community does not bear the responsibility for the disease, for its transmission, for its cure, or for its prevention – but we continue to take leadership where it is needed. And it is needed.

For the record, the AIDS virus is not transmitted by casual physical contact, mosquito or insect bites, kissing, coughing or sneezing, sharing toilets or washroom facilities, consuming food or drink handled by someone who has HIV.

**"How can I support my family members/friends who I think are LGBT, but who aren't out to me?"**

First of all, figure out if you've sent signals that you're open to hearing that they're LGBT. If they remember you for homophobic attitudes that you've since outgrown – you'll need to tell them or show them that you no longer think that way (they won't assume you've had an epiphany). You can talk in positive and natural ways about LGBT issues, and other LGBT people you know (warning: we do get tired of hearing "some of my best friends are gay..."), but recognize that their coming out will happen on their timetable, not on yours. Be patient, and keep caring. Oh – and don't assume that you know someone is gay and they "just haven't figured it out for themselves yet" – that's insulting.

It's a big, big step to come out – the prospect of losing friends,

family, community, is pretty daunting. Don't be angry that you're not the first one we told, or be boastful that you've known it all along – remember, this is about us, not about you. Go easy.

**“I'm a very tolerant person, and I think we're all entitled to our private lives.”**

We're not so interested in being tolerated. Something more along the lines of equality and mutual appreciation would feel better.

Comments like: “you're not gay to me, you're a person” or “What you do in bed is your own business” or “that's fine as long as you don't flaunt it” tell us that heterosexual support is conditional on us behaving in ways that are defined by others, not by us. And, these comments deny the social and legal realities of discrimination, as well as ignore the pain of invisibility and the stress of being in the closet. . .

“Flaunt” usually means when we do or say anything that makes people aware that we're LGBT. And yet, we're constantly listening to stories of heterosexual relationship woes or weddings, dates and sex lives. Heterosexual images (often highly sexual ones, and rigid gender roles) are plastered on every billboard, and many heterosexuals think nothing of engaging in sexual physical contact in (very) public places – like airports, sidewalks, movie theatres, etc. When LGBT people do speak about our families or show affection in public, we are breaking society's code of silence, we are acting courageously and we are refusing to be invisible. That said, most of us have learned to be rather reserved...

Remember, same sex relationships are positive and natural ways of loving and being in the world. LGBT lives are as varied as those of heterosexual people. We may be in permanent relationships or we may have a series of partners. We are monogamous or non-monogamous, single or in couples. We come in all shapes, sizes, races and ages, and from all economic, cultural and religious backgrounds. We are parents, children and grandparents. We are your brothers and sisters. If you're lucky, we're your friends.

**“How do I show that I'm an ally?”**

Interrupt homophobic jokes and bullying. Stand up for LGBT members even when it's not popular. Use language that tells us you're open. Participate in the positive space campaign by putting

a pride or safe space sticker on your binder or your door, as a way of signalling to our LGBT members and our broader membership that we value our LGBT members and we're committed to the struggle for stronger human rights and equality. Support us when we run in union elections – take responsibility for making it a harassment-free campaign. Assume that we make the union stronger. See us as whole people.

### **If you want to be an ally . . .**

Use the words lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans. It will make us feel less invisible and it will teach others to say it too.

Examine how you became heterosexual – because there is as much or as little 'cause' for that as there is for us.

Don't always claim heterosexual rights by making it clear you are straight. Cast doubts in people's minds about your own sexual orientation. Make it clear that it would be no insult to mistake you for a lesbian or a gay man.

Don't assume anyone is exclusively heterosexual. Use gender-neutral language when talking about your spouse and when talking about someone else's.

Don't 'out' us. We may have told you that we are gay, lesbian, trans or bisexual, but don't assume that we have chosen to share this with others. Just because we're 'out' in one situation, doesn't mean we're 'out' in another. Respect our right to make these decisions and declarations on our own.

Let the people you care about know that whomever they choose to love, whoever they choose to be, you will celebrate with them.

Actively support us in our struggle to obtain human rights protection for lesbians and gays, bisexuals and trans members of our society.

**"Why do gay men have such great fashion sense? What's so queer about a 3 dollar bill? Why are lesbians such good organizers? What do they really do in bed?"**

When we said "everything you wanted to know about LGBT issues", we were just kidding.

## The CLC and our affiliates are committed to Pride

The Canadian Labour Congress passed its first policy opposing discrimination against gays and lesbian in 1980. Since that time, the CLC, its affiliated unions, provincial federations and labour councils have:

- worked on policy in the areas of sexual orientation discrimination, trans rights and the sex trade
- established solidarity and pride working groups and committees to allow LGBT unionists to meet and work together to further the “gay agenda”
- held national and regional LGBT conferences
- negotiated collective agreement language prohibiting discrimination, setting up harassment protection, providing benefits for same-sex partners
- filed and won grievances for LGBT workers
- supported the LGBT movement’s court challenges financially and through direct interventions at the Supreme Court
- lobbied federal and provincial governments to amend human rights legislation, to pass laws mandating equal benefits and equal marriage rights
- worked in alliance with LGBT organizations such as Egale and ARC International
- developed and delivered LGBT educational courses and integrated LGBT issues into general human rights and union education courses
- produced and distributed posters, flyers and buttons promoting LGBT rights and opposing homophobia and transphobia
- elected leaders in the labour movements specifically to represent LGBT members; the Canadian Labour Congress has a designated LGBT Vice-President who sits on the Executive Council, the highest body in the labour movement
- union members and leaders across the country promote and participate in Pride Day every year

Canadian unionists are proud to represent our LGBT members and we’re proud to work in solidarity with the greater LGBT community.

**Some Definitions:**

**Bisexual:** Someone who is attracted to members of both sexes. Studies show that approximately 15% of people are actively bisexual (1/3 of American men are reported to have had a sexual experience with another man at some point in their lives.)

**Faggot:** English term for a small bundle of sticks. During the Inquisition, gay men were tied to bundles of sticks and used as kindling to start fires to burn 'witches'.

**Family:** "A bunch of people, or not so many, who love each other." - Lisa, aged 7, lives with her two moms.

**Gay / Lesbian:** Describes someone who is attracted to and connects emotionally with others of their own sex. Studies show that approximately 10% of people are gay or lesbian.

**Harassment:** Includes jokes, innuendoes, unwelcome remarks, taunting, refusal to work alongside, and physical and sexual assault.

**Heterosexual:** Several years after the term homosexual was coined, this word was invented to describe people who are attracted to members of the opposite sex.

**Heterosexism:** The belief that heterosexuality is the only normal and proper expression of sexuality in society.

**Homophobia:** A fear of homosexuality and/or the dislike/hatred of gays and lesbians. Also, the fear of feelings of love for members of one's own sex and therefore the hatred of these feelings in others.

**Homosexual:** A medical term coined in the late 19th century. It is used mainly in psychiatry as a clinical label for people attracted to members of their own sex.

**Lesbians:** Women who are attracted to other women. Because the issues facing gay men and lesbians are different, many lesbians prefer the term lesbian instead of 'gay woman'.

**Straight:** A popular term for heterosexual. Not necessarily derogatory as in: "I may be straight, but I'm not narrow."

**Transsexual:** Someone whose gender identity is not the same as their birth biological sex (for example gender identity of a woman with male biological characteristics). Trans people may, through surgeries and hormone treatments transition (male to female or female to male).

**Trans:** An inclusive category, that encompasses transvestites, cross-dressers, and transsexuals who are in process of or have completed the process of a sex change.

**Transvestite:** Someone who dresses in the clothing of the opposite sex.

**Two-spirited:** Term used in some Aboriginal communities to describe gay men, lesbians, bisexuals and trans people (as in 3rd gender people).

***To our allies:***

*We hope this booklet has been helpful. For more information please contact [www.canadianlabour.ca](http://www.canadianlabour.ca)*

*Thank you for working with us in building a safer, fairer, world. We know that you know that it's in all of our interest to protect and promote human rights. We also know that you take risks on our behalf and that it's not easy. Please, keep at it; we need each other.*

*The CLC would like to thank the CAW for permission to adapt this booklet for use by the labour movement.*





# U n t i l . . .

**Until** we're considered equal, and not simply 'tolerated'.

**Until** our youth aren't forced to leave home for the streets.

**Until** our partners are welcome at all family, social and workplace events.

**Until** the police are there to protect us not harass us.

**Until** sex trade workers are not seen as criminals.

**Until** our children see our families reflected in school curriculum and story books.

**Until** our differences and our cultures are celebrated not denied.

**Until** it's safe to come out at work.

**Until** it's safe to come out at school.

**Until** hospitals, banks, travel agents, and insurance companies see us as people not problems or profits.

**Until** we're not stereotyped into certain jobs or denied others.

**Until** parents aren't freaked out by having lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender children.

**Until** we don't have to justify, explain and expose our private lives.

**Until** harassment at work stops.

**Until** our streets are safe for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people.

**Until** religions open their doors to our celebrations and expressions of faith.

**Until** we can express our gender without fear of reprisal or ridicule.

**Until** gender stereotyping stops and we are all free to be wholly human.

**Until** the cure for homophobia is discovered.

**Until** we can love and be loved, with joy and gay abandon.

**The Canadian Labour Congress is committed to human rights. We respect, welcome and support our lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans members and friends and allies.**

