

# COMING OUT

## ISSUES SURROUNDING DISCLOSURE OF SEXUAL ORIENTATION

MELISSA S. GREEN

---

*Summary.* This report takes a theoretical look at the universal lesbian/gay experience of coming out, and the effects decisions about coming out to others may have on the lives of gay men and lesbians. Individuals who are open about their sexual orientation are more likely to experience negative sanctions from both family members and non-family members than are highly-closeted individuals; more closeted individuals, however, are more likely to suffer from alienation, depression, low self-esteem, and conflicts about their sexual orientation. Sanctions due to sexual orientation bias, or fear of such sanctions, may result in negative coping styles, including an increased risk for problem drinking and drug abuse.

---

# COMING OUT

## ISSUES SURROUNDING DISCLOSURE OF SEXUAL ORIENTATION

MELISSA S. GREEN

---

### A Demographic Overview of *One in Ten* Respondents

Identity's 1985 study *One in Ten* surveyed 734 lesbian, gay, and bisexual Alaskans. In our<sup>1</sup> preliminary report of findings, *One in Ten*, we provided an overview of the gay, lesbian, and bisexual population of Alaska in relation to a wide variety of issues, including relationships, parenthood, religion, health, coming out, discrimination, politics, leisure, needs, and attitudes.

Over half (56%) of *One in Ten*'s respondents were women; the remaining 44% were, of course, men. They ranged in age from 14 to 66 years old. They tended to be well-educated, gainfully employed individuals with long-term residence in Alaska (average residency 9.8 years). They worked in a wide variety of occupations in professional, managerial, technical, industrial, and service fields. They came from all over the state, with most being from the Anchorage, Fairbanks, or Juneau areas. They enjoyed outdoor activities, listening to musical recordings or to the radio, watching television or videos, reading, writing, gardening, repairing or building things, spending time with friends.

In short, *One in Ten*'s respondents are not unlike most other Alaskans in the types of careers they pursue, leisure activities they enjoy, educational and income levels they have achieved, places they live. Like Alaska's population as a whole, they are a diverse community.

Diverse as they are, one thing that all Alaska's lesbians and gay men have in common, aside from sexual orientation itself, is the experience of *coming out*, that is, of recognizing their sexual orientation and accepting it as part of their identities, and of possibly making their sexual orientation known to other people. Coming out ranks as a central experience in the lives of many, if not most, gay men's and lesbians' lives. But why is it so central? Who do lesbians and gays come out to, and why? And, equally important, why not? What are the consequences of coming out or, conversely, of "staying in the closet?"

### The Experience of Coming Out

Coming out is not so much a single experience as it is a continuous experience. Karla Jay writes,

[The coming-out process] will never end, for I live in a heterosexist world where the presumption is that I'm straight, so that every time I meet a new person (and that's quite often), I have to recommence that coming-out process. (Jay, 1978: p. 28)

#### A. Elfin Moses and Robert O. Hawkins expand on this:

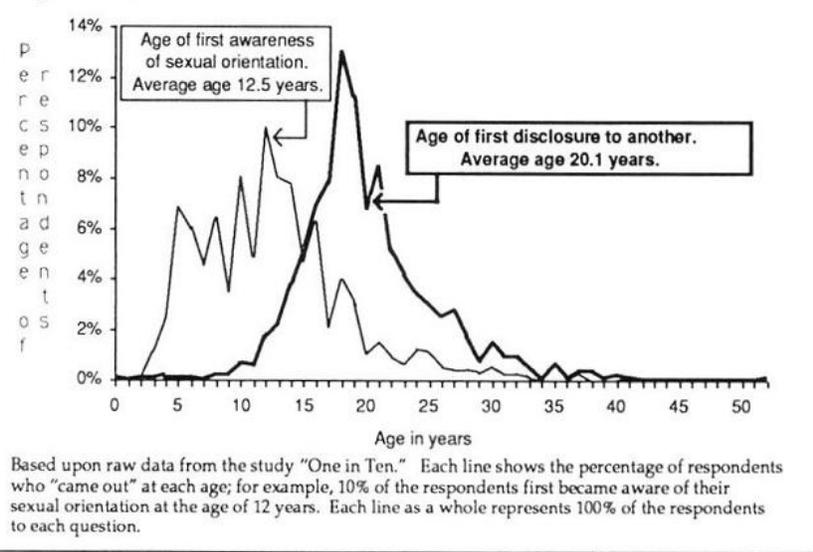
Coming out of the closet, that is, identifying or labeling oneself as gay, is one of the most difficult and potentially traumatic experiences a gay person undertakes. For many gays, it is a long process from the first awareness of being different to self-labeling, and from there to letting others know of one's sexual orientation. A lot of gay people's energy goes into deciding where, when, how, and whom to tell about being gay and in worrying about the possible consequences of being "out" to significant others. (Moses and Hawkins, 1982: p. 42)

The "significant others" lesbians and gay men must make coming-out decisions about include virtually every person with whom they have some sort of relationship or significant contact—parents, sisters and brothers, and other relatives, friends (both gay and nongay), co-workers, employers and supervisors, landlords, neighbors, clergymen, medical or mental health providers, employees of businesses or services they patronize, etc. For each of these people, the gay or lesbian individual must weigh the significance of the relationship and what the consequences of coming out to that person might be. Depending upon the significance of the relationship, and the potential negative consequences of coming out, decisions about whether or not to tell another are frequently characterized by stress, guilt, and fear.

### Coming Out to Family Members

One measure of the difficulty and fear experienced in coming out may be *One in Ten*'s finding that, on the average, Alaska's gay men and lesbians first recognize their sexual orientation when they are 12.5 years old, but do

**FIGURE 1. Age of first awareness of sexual orientation and age of first disclosure of sexual orientation to another person by "One in Ten" respondents.**



not come out to another person till they are about 20 years old—nearly 8 years later. (See Figure 1.)

This finding indicates that the most significant others in young homosexually-oriented persons' lives — their mothers and fathers—are more often than not entirely ignorant of a fundamental component of their children's make-up. Even in adulthood, only 42% of gay/lesbian children come out to their fathers, 58% to their mothers. Of the parents who know their child's sexual orientation, 22% of the fathers and 17% of the mothers are not accepting of their lesbian or gay children. Siblings were both more likely to be told (62%) and less likely to be non-accepting (8%) than were parents. (See Figure 2.)

A majority of parents and siblings who know *are* accepting of their gay or lesbian family members; nonetheless, fear of rejection or other sanctions is likely the chief reason many lesbians and gay men do not come out to family members.

Nor are these fears necessarily groundless. Literature about gays and lesbians abounds with references to antigay reactions by family members: belittling, rejecting, or disowning gay sons or lesbian daughters, forcing them into therapy for a "cure" or committing them to mental institutions, etc. A 1984 study by the National Gay Task Force (NGTF) reported:

In 1981, an Ohio family hired "deprogrammers" to "rescue" their daughter from lesbianism. The young woman was maced and taken by force from a sidewalk near her apartment, and held for a week in another state where she claims she was "mentally tortured" and repeatedly sexually assaulted. (National Gay Task Force, 1984: p. 1)

The NGTF study found that about one-third of its 2,074 respondents (from eight U.S. cities) had been verbally abused by at least one relative (father, mother, sister, brother, or other relative) because of their sexual orientation; over six percent had been physically abused by a relative (National Gay Task Force, 1984: p. 6). (See Figure 3.)

**Coming Out to Non-family Members**

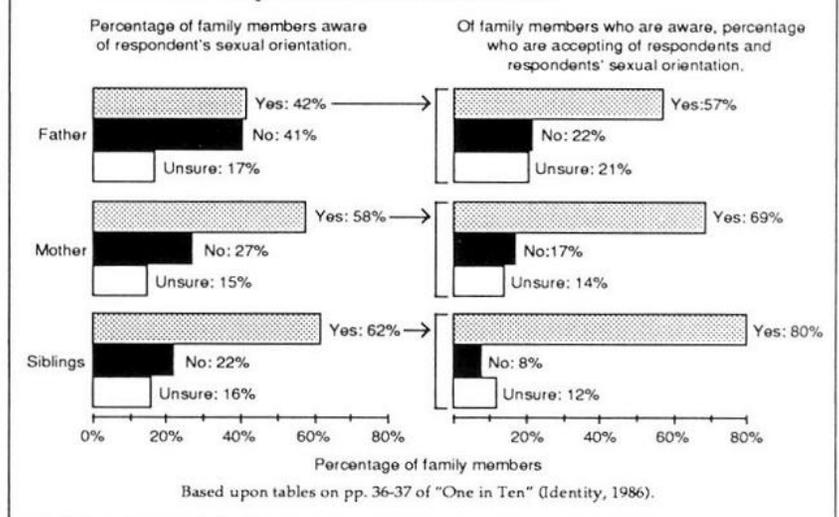
Gay men and lesbians are generally assumed to be heterosexual unless they fit the common stereotypes about homosexuals to some degree—which most do not. They will often go to great lengths to hide their sexual orientation from others to protect themselves from discrimination or violence. As Fred E. Jandt and James Darsey write,

They [lesbians and gay men] do not wear their stigma on the surface, where it is immediately obvious to all who care to look.... This ability to pass is a mixed blessing; in opposition to the rewards it provides, it creates the constant anxiety of one who lives under a fragile construction of lies. (Jandt and Darsey, 1981: p. 14)

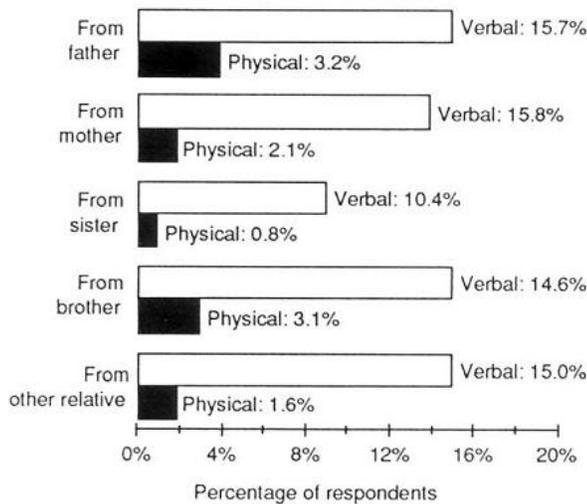
The experience of our respondents confirms this. One writes,

I am very closeted because I fear these troubles, so therefore they do not happen because no one ever knows my sexual orientation. I don't go out with my partner, we don't apply for loans, etc., as a couple; we don't act as a couple in motels, stores, etc.; we haven't done any insurance, housing, etc., as a couple, etc., etc., etc.—the reason all these [responses to discrimi-

**FIGURE 2. Percentage of family members aware and accepting of "One in Ten" respondents' sexual orientation.**



**FIGURE 3. Percentage of "Anti-Gay/Lesbian Victimization" respondents who experienced verbal or physical abuse from family members because of sexual orientation.**



Based upon Table J on p. 26 of "Anti-Gay/Lesbian Victimization" (National Gay Task Force, 1984). Approx. one-third of respondents experienced verbal abuse from at least one family member; over one in fifteen experienced physical abuse. A total of 2074 respondents from eight U.S. cities were surveyed.

to "pass" as heterosexual—does not automatically preclude the effects of sexual orientation bias. "Prima Facie" (also in this volume) presents several incidents in which respondents, including some heterosexuals, experienced bias, discrimination, harassment, or violence as a result of assumptions or rumors other people (relative strangers as well as people known to them) made about them—assumptions and rumors over which respondents exercised no control.

Fully 71% of *One in Ten's* respondents experienced one or more forms of discrimination or abuse in Alaska because of their sexual orientation (see Figure 5). As high as it is, this figure does not necessarily reflect the total experience of antigay bias experienced by respondents during their lifetimes: since the *One in Ten* questionnaire asked respondents to report only those incidents which had taken place in Alaska, and since many respondents had moved to Alaska from other states or nations, any difficulties they experienced elsewhere are not included in *One in Ten's* findings.

One question we could not address in *One in Ten* was the incidence of antigay bias directed against lesbian and gay youth, or those youths perceived to be lesbian or gay. Given our finding that the average age of first awareness of homosexual or bisexual orientation is 12.5 years, and given the "Prima Facie" finding that nongay individuals are sometimes misperceived as gay or lesbian, it is probable that children and teenagers are also victims of antigay bias. In fact, NGTF's 1984 study found that 32.2% of its respondents (45.1% of males, 19.3% of females) had been "harassed, threatened with violence, or physically assaulted in high school or junior high school because they were perceived to be gay or lesbian" (National Gay Task Force, 1984: pp. 6, 26). The possible implications of this finding on Alaska's school-age children should not go unexplored.

Gay and lesbian Alaskans see a distinct relationship between coming out and the attainment of equal rights and

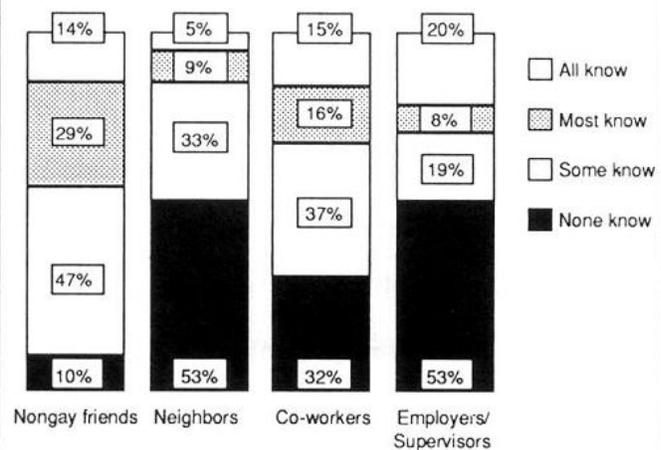
nation questions] say never is because we never let anyone know our sexual orientation. It is a terrible and unfair existence. (Respondent comment on *One in Ten* questionnaire)

Results from *One in Ten* show that Alaska's gay men and lesbians are not open about their sexual orientation to many non-family members with whom they have frequent contact. Of the four groups about which respondents were asked—nongay friends, neighbors, co-workers, and employers/supervisors—employers/supervisors and neighbors are by far the least likely to be aware of respondents' sexual orientation (see Figure 4).

While perhaps neighbors are not made aware because they are the least significant to respondents in terms of day-to-day life, it is highly probably that fear of discrimination plays a most important role in decisions not to be open to supervisors or employers. In fact, 23% of our respondents agreed with the statement, "If my current employer or supervisor found out about my sexual orientation, I would be fired or laid off" (p. 42). Roughly 6% wrote on their questionnaires comments—some of which are included in Appendix A—to the effect that they had not experienced discrimination because they were so closeted, and that they were closeted because they feared discrimination.

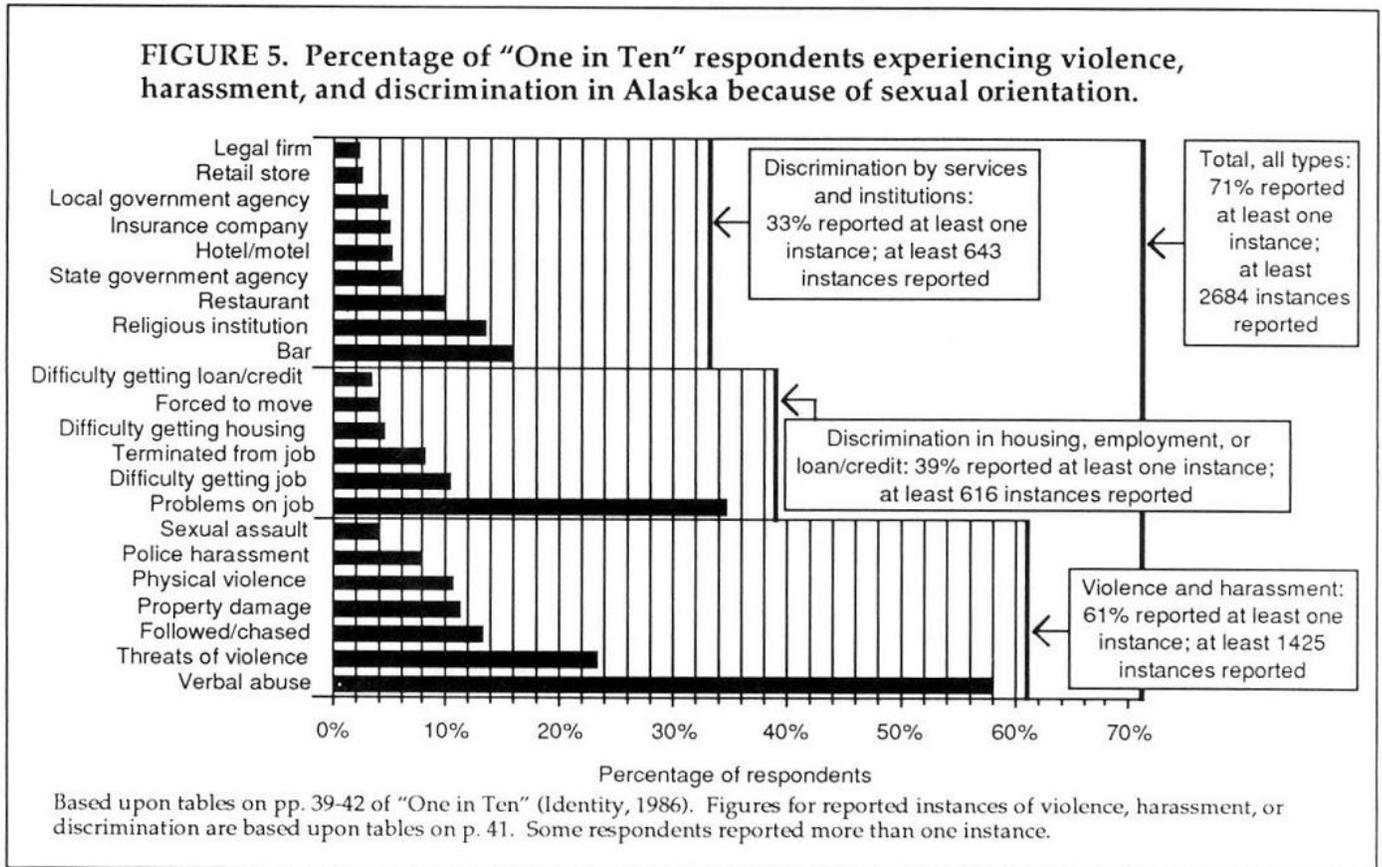
But even the decision to stay in the closet—to attempt

**FIGURE 4. Knowledge of "One in Ten" respondents' sexual orientation by non-family members.**



Based upon table on p. 38 of "One in Ten" (Identity, 1986). Respondents were asked, "How many of the following people living in Alaska know for sure what your sexual orientation is?" Possible answers were "None," "Some," "Most," or "All." The percentages above represent the percentage of respondents providing each answer. Percentages in each column total to 100%.

protection from discrimination and other sanctions. Though 53% of *One in Ten's* respondents believed their communities were unsafe to live in openly as gay men or lesbians (p. 42), 64% agreed with the statement that, "Equal rights and opportunities for lesbians and gay men can only be achieved when we 'come out of the closet' in greater numbers" (p. 48). Nevertheless, personal decisions to come out are not perceived as being enough: 51% of our respondents saw advocacy for a lesbian/gay equal rights bill as a service they would most benefit from as gay or lesbian Alaskans, making such advocacy the top service priority by lesbians' and gay men's own testimony (p. 47).<sup>2</sup>



**"Passing" as a Trade-Off**

The lives of gay men are not only affected, but often severely limited, by societal attitudes about homosexuality. Not only actual discrimination, but fear of it—or its recurrence—have important bearing upon the manner in which gay men and lesbians conduct their lives.

One example may be found in a 1986 study of 3404 lesbians and gay men in the Chicago area by researchers at the Department of Psychology, University of Illinois, Chicago. The Chicago researchers found an interesting relationship between outness and socio-economic status. Lesbian and gay respondents with higher status occupations, the researchers found, tended to be more closeted, "probably due to the pressures of homophobia in higher status occupations." The researchers raised the possibility that the question of outness may have a direct impact on the employment choices made by many gays and lesbians:

These data may...reflect the often discussed "underemployment" syndrome in that many people who are completely out may reconcile themselves to jobs that, while having relatively low prestige and poorly paying, nevertheless do not require them to conceal their sexual orientation. Thus, there is some evidence here that socio-economic status and being out are in conflict. (McKirnan and Peterson, 1986: p. 4)

This finding may help explain a curious aspect of *One in Ten's* findings on outness to the non-family members about which we asked. Though employers and supervisors were, with neighbors, the *least* likely to be aware of respondents' sexual orientation, they were also among the *most* likely to be aware (see Figure 4). Twenty percent of the respondents reported that *all* their employers and supervisors were aware. We are naturally no longer able to ask these respondents how or why their superiors knew, but it is possible that some of them were unwilling to live in the "fragile construction of lies" of which Jandt and Darsey speak, and made conscious decisions to be open about their sexual orientation in the workplace. If so, it would be interesting to know if this choice had any bearing

upon they types of jobs these respondents sought or held.

The Chicago researchers discovered another important association related to socio-economic status and outness:

In the attitude section of the questionnaire people were asked about the degree of stress or conflict they felt from work, family or friends, or within themselves over being gay or lesbian. For each of these measures being more closeted was associated with more stress or conflict over sexual orientation. (McKirnan and Peterson, 1986: pp. 3-4)

Closetedness was also associated with alienation (i.e., "a sense of isolation or distance from other people"), depression, and low self-esteem (McKirnan and Peterson, 1987a: p. 2). Hence, individuals with higher socio-economic status, who were more likely to be closeted, also were more likely to experience internal conflict and emotional/psychological difficulties than were other gay men and lesbians.

Choices about disclosure of one's sexual orientation thus represent a trade-off. Gay or lesbian individuals who choose to be open about their sexual orientation are more likely to experience discrimination and other sanctions than closeted individuals, and are more likely to settle for low-paying, low-status jobs where their sexual orientation will present less of an issue; more closeted individuals, however, are more likely to enjoy the benefits of high-income, high-status jobs, but at the cost of low self-esteem, depression, and internal conflict about their sexual orientation.

The Chicago researchers are careful to point out that such internal conflict "may cause people to be less out, or being more closeted may itself cause conflict" (McKirnan and Peterson, 1987a: p.2). But whatever the cause and effect relationship may be,

Conflict over sexual orientation is obviously important, both because it may lead to other problems such as alcohol or drug abuse, and because researchers and clinicians have traditionally argued that many gays and lesbians experience such conflicts. (McKirnan and Peterson, 1987a: p.1)

### Social Outlets and Coping

If, because of fear of discrimination or other sanctions, they are unable to be out around nongays, then the only places where gay men and lesbians can relax and be themselves is in the company of other gays and lesbians. In many communities, the chief social outlet for lesbians and gays is the gay bar. A 1975 report on alcoholism in Los Angeles' gay community observes:

It seems that bars are not only built into the basic social fabric of the gay community, but also have been institutionalized into community centers with drinking as a basic activity. For gay people, bars are vital socializing centers, fulfilling functions that are relegated to a wide range of non-alcohol-centered institutions for heterosexuals. Further, in most gay communities, gay bars are the only places with a guaranteed "gay" environment, and the only places where gay men and women can relax. (Fifield, DeCrescenzo, and Latham, 1975)

The Los Angeles report found that about 32% of L.A.'s lesbians and gays were at risk for problem-drinking or alcoholism. While the report did not blame the problem of gay/lesbian alcoholism on the bars themselves, it did find a clear relationship between alcoholism and the lack of alternative places to socialize. According to the report:

Current bar users spend an average of 80% of their gay social activities time in bars and parties where alcohol is served. Recovered alcoholics, prior to treatment, averaged 76% of their time at bars and parties.... (Fifield, DeCrescenzo, and Latham, 1975)

Obviously, the lesbian/gay community in Alaska is not identical to that of Los Angeles. Yet *One in Ten's* findings show many striking parallels with the L.A. report's. Despite the fact that most Alaskan communities do not have gay/lesbian bars<sup>3</sup>, gay/lesbian bars ranked second only to private parties (at which alcohol may or may not be served) as the places respondents most often met other lesbians or gay men (p. 44).

*One in Ten* also found that lesbian and gay Alaskans are at about the same risk for problem drinking or alcoholism as are their counterparts in Los Angeles. We asked our respondents if their use of alcohol had ever resulted in certain effects: charges of DWI, promises made to themselves not to drink so much, someone telling them they drink too much, physical health problems, depression, interference with significant relationships, or blackouts. 35% of *One in Ten's* respondents had experienced 3 or more of these effects as a result of their drinking. According to alcoholism professionals we consulted, experience of 2 or 3 of these effects of drinking indicate that the subject is at risk as a problem drinker or alcoholic.

The University of Illinois, Chicago, study clarifies some of these issues. The Chicago researchers found that the overall frequency of alcohol use among lesbians and gays is virtually identical to simple alcohol use in the general

population. However, a significantly higher proportion of gays and lesbians experienced problems from drinking than did nongays—about 26% as compared to 16% of the general population (of which about 5 to 7% are actual alcoholics) (McKirnan and Peterson, 1986: p. 5).

In their discussion of “coping resources,” the Chicago researchers found that frequenting gay bars did not in and of itself lead to risk for problem drinking; rather, risk came about when an individual used gay bars *exclusive* of other coping resources. In other words, a gay or lesbian individual who had no social outlets (friends and confidants, clubs and organizations, etc.) *other* than bars were more likely to have problems (McKirnan and Peterson, 1987b: p. 2).

The Chicago researchers also found that individuals who responded to stress by going to bars to be with strangers (as opposed to going to bars to meet and socialize with friends) were more likely to have problems of self-esteem and depression. According to the researchers:

Bar/stranger coping style is more common for those of lower socio-economic status, but surprisingly is unrelated to peoples' ages or how “out” they are...Men who feel any of the different forms of discrimination we measured — particularly “personal” discrimination such as verbal abuse or assault—are more likely to use this bar/stranger coping style, although there were no such correlations for women. This consistent relationship between discrimination and bar/stranger coping styles may point up an important consequence of discrimination that should be explored further. (McKirnan and Peterson, 1987b: p. 4)

Likewise, gay men (but not lesbians), who use alcohol and drugs as a means to cope with stress are more likely to be people who have experienced discrimination. In general, about 36% of gays and lesbians, regardless of their socio-economic status or number of friends or confidants, sometimes or often respond to stress by taking drugs or drinking (McKirnan and Peterson, 1987b: p. 4).

It is difficult to ascertain how strong a role antigay bias plays in affecting a lesbian's or gay man's self-image or self-esteem, or how strong a role bias or self-esteem play in establishing risk for problem drinking or other unhealthy coping mechanisms. Nonetheless, the evidence provided by the Los Angeles and Chicago studies — particularly the association between discrimination against gay men and negative coping styles—clearly suggests that a relationship exists.

Results from other questions put to *One in Ten* respondents about drinking behavior seem to confirm that alcohol is a problem among many of Alaska's gays and lesbians. Furthermore, we found that over two-thirds of our respondents used some type of drug at least once a month, and that 42% at least occasionally used drugs other than marijuana and bottled nitrates, or “poppers” (p. 34). There is some recognition of these problems in the gay/lesbian community. As one *One in Ten* respondent commented,

[I] found the drug section the most difficult to be honest with — am sure most of the people I know felt the same. The alcohol and drug abuse within the community is the most prevalent problem we face. Scares and saddens me. (Respondent comment on *One in Ten* questionnaire)

Nearly a third of our respondents said that they preferred gay/lesbian social events that did not serve alcohol to events that did; two thirds felt that their town needed a community facility for gay men and lesbians, perhaps as an alternative place to meet and socialize with their peers (p. 46). Large numbers (23%) had already participated in substance abuse treatment programs or self-help groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, Emotions Anonymous, or Adult Children of Alcoholics (p. 28).

Interestingly, of the programs and self-help groups in which respondents participated, 38% were not made aware of respondents' sexual orientation (p. 29). Respondents told us that in 30% of these cases they did not disclose their sexual orientation because of fear that the provider or other participants in their groups would either tell others about them or would disapprove of them (p. 30). Such fear undermines two of the helping principles of such groups: unqualified acceptance by the group or group members, and assurance of confidentiality or anonymity. It is ironic that sanctions should be so feared within the therapeutic setting, which was sought in the first place to remedy problems which may have been partially created by sanctions in the world-at-large.

### A Hopeful Note

Despite the difficulties described above, most *One in Ten* respondents did not report having experienced either social or psychological problems as a result of stress, even stress related to discrimination, harassment, or violence. The Chicago study similarly found:

The results of the Social Issues Survey make it clear that while gays and lesbians experience considerable stress and, in particular, discrimination...most people have social resources, and do not report major psychological or social problems. Those who experience the least psychological distress have access to more resources, whether it be interpersonal networks, recreational resources, or involvement in the gay and lesbian community....As with previous reports from the Social Issues

Survey, we are able to report here that gays and lesbians generally look "healthy" on the different measures of resources. (McKirnan and Peterson, 1987b: p. 6)

Extensive use of interpersonal networks of friends and (to a lesser extent) family figure largely in most gays' and lesbians' success in dealing with stress in their lives.

## Conclusions

It is apparent that lesbian and gay Alaskans suffer from discrimination and other antigay sanctions. What is less obvious is what effects societal prejudice against homosexuality had even when there is no overt discrimination. This study's intent was to provide a brief look at some of these effects and how they relate to the universal gay/lesbian experience of choices about coming out. In short:

- On the average, lesbian and gay Alaskans first recognize their sexual orientation at the age of 12.5 years, but do not disclose their sexual orientation to another till the age of 20.1 years.
- Seventy-one percent of gay and lesbian Alaskans have experienced one or more forms of discrimination, harassment, or violence because of their sexual orientation while living in Alaska. Sanctions due to sexual orientation bias may come from both family members and from non-family members, including employers, landlords, schoolmates, services, and relative strangers.
- Lesbians and gay men are frequently unwilling to disclose their sexual orientation to others due to fear of sanctions.
- Gay men and lesbians who are open about their sexual orientation tend to experience sanctions more readily than those who hide their sexual orientation, and are more likely to settle for low-paying, low-status jobs where their sexual orientation will not present an issue. Those who hide their sexual orientation are more likely to enjoy the benefits of high-paying, high-status jobs, but at the cost of alienation, depression, low self-esteem, and conflicts about their sexual orientation.
- Sanctions due to sexual orientation bias, or the fear of such sanctions, cause stress which may result in negative coping styles, including an increased risk for problem drinking and drug abuse. About 35% of gay and lesbian Alaskans are at risk for problem drinking.
- Twenty-three percent of lesbian and gay Alaskans believe they would be fired or laid off if their current employer or supervisor learned of their sexual orientation. Fifty-three percent believe their communities are unsafe to live in openly as gay men or lesbians. Sixty-four percent believe that, "Equal rights and opportunities for lesbians and gay men can only be achieved when we 'come out of the closet' in greater numbers." Fifty-one percent see advocacy for a lesbian/gay equal rights bill as the service from which they would most benefit as gay and lesbian Alaskans.

## Notes:

1. The author of this report was also the primary writer for the *One in Ten* preliminary report of findings. Unless otherwise noted, page numbers in parentheses refer to page numbers in *One in Ten: A Profile of Alaska's Lesbian and Gay Community* (Anchorage: Identity, Inc., 1986).
2. One in Ten respondents were asked, "From the following list, which 3 services do you feel you would benefit from most as a gay man or lesbian in Alaska?" Ten options were provided. Responses in order of frequency were as follows: 1) advocacy for a lesbian/gay rights bill in Alaska (51% of the respondents gave this as one of their three service priorities); 2) an annual guide to gay/lesbian-supportive services (46%); 3) lesbian/gay social events, theater, concerts (40%); 4) statewide education about lesbians/gays and their issues (36%); 5) workshops/retreats for gays/lesbians on personal growth (30%); 6) sports, hiking, etc. for lesbians/gays (25%); 7) health consultation and examination services (22%); 8) sexual identity and relationship counseling (16%); 9) statewide phone counseling for gay men/lesbians (13%); 10) housing/employment information for lesbians/gays (10%).
3. At the time of the study, there were a total of three gay/lesbian bars in Anchorage and one in Fairbanks. At the time of this writing, there are only two in Anchorage, and none, to the author's awareness, in any other part of Alaska.

## References:

Fifield, Lillene, De Crescenzo, Teresa A., & Latham, J. David. (1975). "Alcoholism and the Gay Community." Los Angeles: Identity. (1986). *One in Ten: A Profile of Alaska's Lesbian and Gay Community*. Anchorage: Identity, Inc.

- Jandt, Fred E. & Darsey, James. (1981). "Coming Out as a Communicative Process" in James E. Chesebro, (Ed.), *GaySpeak: Gay Male & Lesbian Communication*. New York: The Pilgrim Press.
- Jay, Karla. (1978). "Coming Out as Process" in Ginny Vida (Ed.), *Our Right to Love: A Lesbian Resource Book*. Englewood Cliff, NJ: Prentice-Hall International, Inc.
- McKirnan, David J. & Peterson, Peggy. (1986). "Preliminary Social Issues Survey results," *Windy City Times*, Oct 2.
- McKirnan, David J. & Peterson, Peggy. (1987a). "Chicago survey documents anti-gay bias," *Windy City Times*, Mar 12.
- McKirnan, David J. & Peterson, Peggy. (1987b). "Social Issues Survey Report #3: Social Support and Coping Resources." Chicago: The University of Illinois at Chicago Department of Psychology.
- Moses, A. Elfin & Hawkins, Jr., Robert O. (1982). *Counseling Lesbian Women & Gay Men: A Life-Issues Approach*. Columbus, OH: Merrill Publishing Co.
- National Gay Task Force. (1984). *Anti-Gay/Lesbian Victimization: a study by the National Gay Task Force in cooperation with Gay and Lesbian Organizations in Eight U.S. Cities*. Washington, D.C.: National Gay Task Force.

## A SAMPLING OF ONE IN TEN RESPONDENTS' COMMENTS ON DISCRIMINATION, AS WRITTEN.

*I had to answer never to most [discrimination] questions because my experiences are based on most of the involved not knowing my sexual orientation. I don't know how they would be different if they knew.*

*I have had no direct experiences of these sorts. The discrimination I feel/have felt is a feeling of needing to hide lest these problems occur, and discrimination by "default." I.e., while I'm not married in the technical sense, I am in lifestyle...& I do not have access to the benefits afforded to married couples (insurance, credit, etc.).*

*While I have not experienced most forms of discrimination mentioned, I know that fear of discrimination has had a part in most of my decisions. Even though there is one person at my present job, for instance, who I would normally trust enough to come out to, I'm still afraid to because last time I did, the person betrayed me, and I was fired. I doubt that the same thing would happen this time — this person is not the blabbermouth type — but the fear still influences me.*

*I am not "out of the closet" — that biases some of my responses. As a businessperson it does not behoove me to be openly "gay" or "bi" ....*

*Unfortunately, most [answers to discrimination questions] are checked "never" because i don't dare express affection in public as heterosexuals do all the time. So of course it never happens, because I don't try to claim the same privilege straight folks enjoy. And it angers me! The fact that most gays/lesbians will (probably) check "never" is i think more due to an inability and unwillingness on our part to express who we are in straight society. Most of us don't take that risk and end up checking "never" because we suppress ourselves from doing what straight folks do ALL OVER THE PLACE, ALL THE TIME!*

*I am moderately "closeted" in my public life — i.e. any activities outside my home. However I certainly try to find/create situations where my sexual orientation would not be any consequential importance. I hope to be able to be much more open someday! Life would be so much freer if I never had to think about someone's/anyone's reaction to my lesbianism.*

*I experience relatively no differently [sic] because I don't act out. However being closeted is a constant difficulty and pretending you are what you aren't because you fear physical or verbal abuse is difficult. I too would like to go to a movie, a restaurant, anywhere, arm in arm with my lover and know that I am safe because I am protected by the law.*

*I've had so few difficulties only because I've been so reserved professionally and publicly, about my orientation.*

*The main reason I have "experienced no difficulty" ...is that I have not pushed issues. I do, for example, consider state employee insurance to be discriminatory because I cannot cover my partner with health insurance like people w/ "regular" spouses can. Hence, my answer[s]: Would really like to see a change in this area.*

*I haven't "experienced difficulty" so much as I have simply avoided many opportunities where I thought that difficulties might arise — e.g. taking advantage of Valentine's Day special deals for couples that are occasionally offered by hotels or restaurants — which are, of course, intended for heterosexual couples only.*

*Between ages [ages deleted] I was out of the closet. Between ages [ages deleted] gradually kept a lowering profile & am now in the closet at work & in public. Gen- Many times I've wished that I could be 'out' to the people I work with. Too many times I've seen the knowledge of my sexual orientation be as a barrier between myself and heteros. Thus, the closet! I'm not alone.*

*Verbal abuse was not directed specifically toward me but took the form of jokes, etc. directed at gay and lesbian people in general. This has made all of my work experiences less than ideal.*

*Because I am bisexual and very closeted these things have not actually been a problem. However, I am very fearful of this aspect of my identity being revealed which has added to the stress already present in working in a male dominated profession — and do fear verbal, physical abuse if I came out. Also I believe that many problems on the job may have resulted from my employer seeing me as being an assertive woman, and perhaps believing that I was lovers with my former female roommate (who actually wasn't a lover)...As a bisexual I mainly am forced to react to comments & jokes about "fags & queers" in the workplace, with friends & in general living, and be supportive of anyone's choices about lifestyle. Comments about lesbians are less frequent and direct comments to me have not occurred (but happen behind my back i'm sure). But the fear & paranoia of being revealed to people who would not understand is ever present & prevents my full expression of my identity.*

*I am very closeted because I fear these troubles, so therefore, they do not happen because no one ever knows my sexual*

orientation. I don't go out with my partner, we don't apply for loans, etc., as a couple, we don't act as a couple in motels, stores, etc.; we haven't done any insurance, housing etc. as a couple, etc., etc., etc. — The reason all of these say never is because we never let anyone know our sexual orientation. It is a terrible and unfair existence....Thank you for this questionnaire — Being lesbian is hard when you constantly are afraid of being found out — of losing my job — of getting kicked out of the trailer court — of physical threats, etc. — I hope it changes —

[I haven't had much difficulty with discrimination because of my sexual orientation, mostly because my sexual orientation is not an openly acknowledged fact. While I also don't hide what I am, I am careful to protect my employment. I would greatly appreciate actual protection under the law, so that could live an integrated lifestyle — open and proud at all times about whom and what I am — a lesbian. This is opposed to the current "work affect" and "real me" affect.

I am selective in who is aware of my sexual orientation. Therefore, although my answers are all nevers for these situations, I don't believe it accurately represents discrimination. The major discrimination stems from the fact that I don't proudly tell many people of my sexual orientation.

I believe the only reason I have not had any of the above problems is because I was never open about my lesbianism with people I'd consider unsafe, employers, the people I rent from, etc. The one time I was discriminated against was when I had to take a lie detector test from a potential employer.

One set of questions [discrimination] I answered as unknown because co-workers (most) and others involved do not know my sexual orientation. I know the answers would be negative if they were aware. I am definitely "in the closet."

I am very closeted. I am a [occupation deleted] and look very straight. I am very careful about not letting anyone know of my sexual orientation because of the fact that I have a child and do not want to jeopardize my custody.

Anchorage and Alaska needs very badly a community center for info, seminars, activities, social functions that are non-bar/alcohol-related.

The reason [sic] my answers [to discrimination questions] are "never" is basically because I'm closeted except around supportive non-lesbian/gay friends/coworkers. I am fearful of being "discovered" and many times have not done or said something I've felt because of this subtle sad fear, which is in itself powerful discrimination.

...Found the drug use section the most difficult to be honest with — am sure most of the people I know felt the same. The alcohol and drug abuse w/in the community is the most prevalent problem we face. Scares and saddens me.

I appreciated this questionnaire. I feel particularly isolated with regard to being a lesbian parent on top of being a single parent. I am very tired of hiding although I do feel I can go to the gay bar in town — so it's a kind of half-hide.

I've only been out (even to myself) got 7 months so I've not experienced any of the indicated discrimination. Given time, that may change — unfortunately.

[Answers to discrimination questions] are No because I'm in the closet behind the hangers!

I believe that "coming out" to friends and co-workers is one of the most worthwhile things a gay person can do for themselves and their brothers and sisters. I am in favor of anti-discrimination laws in housing and employment.

...I am in no way an active participant in gay/Lesbian issues...how could I be and still make a \$...I can't let my "sexual preference" be known (in the every day world...) and still be able to work in it. I'd like to...But...one thing at a time.

The main reason I do not feel very much discrimination is because I rarely discuss my sexual preference outside the gay community. The "discrimination" is having to modify my behavior in public so I do not "offend" the straight community.