



# Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Medical Student Experiences: "Out" in Medical School and Perspectives on Curricular Content

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) medical students experience discrimination and hostility in medical school. We assessed LGBT students' experiences in medical school as well as their perspectives on LGBT-related curricular topics to better understand this unexplored population.

**Methods:** Allopathic and osteopathic students were recruited from all medical schools in Canada and the United States to complete a web-based questionnaire investigating LGBT-related curricular content. The questionnaire also asked students' sexual orientation, gender identity, and if they are "out" at their medical schools.

**Results:** Among 8,551 respondents, 915 selected a sexual orientation other than heterosexual, and 35 selected a gender other than male or female. Over 29% of lesbian, gay, and bisexual respondents are not "out" about sexual orientation. The majority (60%) of transgender or other-gendered respondents are not "out" about their gender identity. These students frequently cite "fear of discrimination in medical school" (43%) as a reason for not being "out". The majority (54.6%) of LGBT medical students evaluated LGBT-related curricular content as "poor" or "very poor". Potential strategies for increasing LGBT-specific content included LGBT clinical experiences (82.7%) and focused case discussions (74.3%).

**Conclusion:** LGBT medical students' perspectives on LGBT-related curricular content and quality can be used to improve medical education. Many do not disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity in medical school. We propose more robust AAMC-mediated data collection on medical students' sexual orientation and gender identity in order to further study this unique population of medical students and improve the social climate at medical school.

## Methods

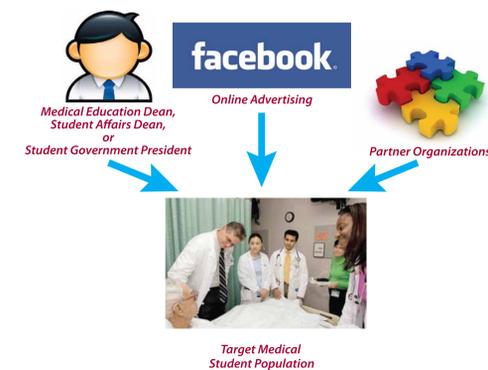
A novel 23-item survey was designed after an extensive literature review. The survey was pilot tested with ~20 medical students from various class years at M.D.- and D.O.-granting institutions in Canada and the United States, and their comments and suggestions were used to finalize the instrument. The survey was designed to be completed in ~20 minutes. Students who identified as LGBT were asked additional questions about whether they were out concerning their sexual orientation and gender identity.

The survey was distributed to students by e-mail via medically-related organizations (e.g., AMSA, AMA-MSS, SOMA) and by advertisements on Facebook. All responses were collected without names and are kept confidential. All study participants could enter a prize giveaway for a \$25.00 amazon.com gift card with approximate odds of winning of 1:50.

Free response data were read in total and preliminary themes were created for the purpose of this poster presentation.

This work (Protocol Number: 15967) was approved by the Stanford University Administrative Panel on Human Subjects in Medical Research (IRB Number: 4947; Panel: 6).

## Participant Recruitment Strategy



## Background

In Medical School (Schatz and O'Hanlan, 1994):  
Surveys mailed to 1311 AAPHR members in the United States and Canada. 711 responded (54%) composed of both medical students and physicians, 50 medical specialties, across 46 states.

Only 5% of medical students felt that "LGB physicians are accepted as equals".

Compared to "closeted" peers, "out" LGB physicians and medical students were much more likely to:

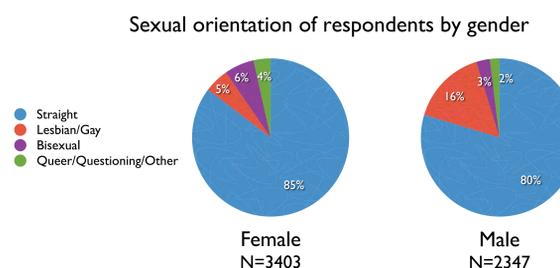
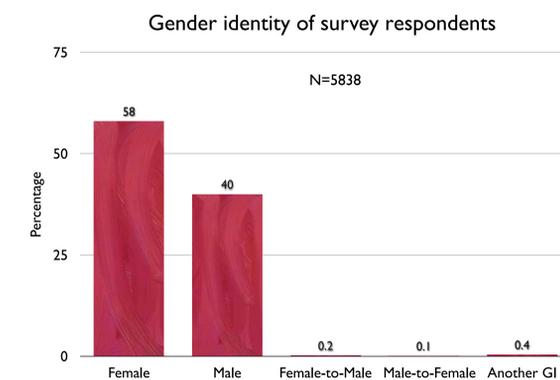
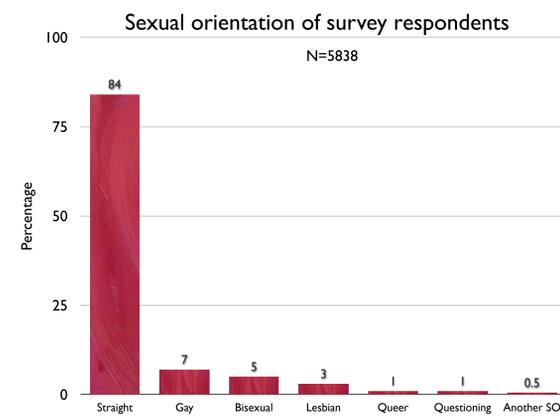
- o experience job related discrimination (29% vs. 12%)
- o experience verbal harassment and insults (47% vs. 30%)
- o be socially ostracized (45% vs. 32%)
- o be discouraged or denied residency (18% vs. 6%)

Applying for Residency (Merchant et al., 2005):  
60 medical students and physicians at the 2005 LGBTM-AMSA and NYGLP forum were surveyed.

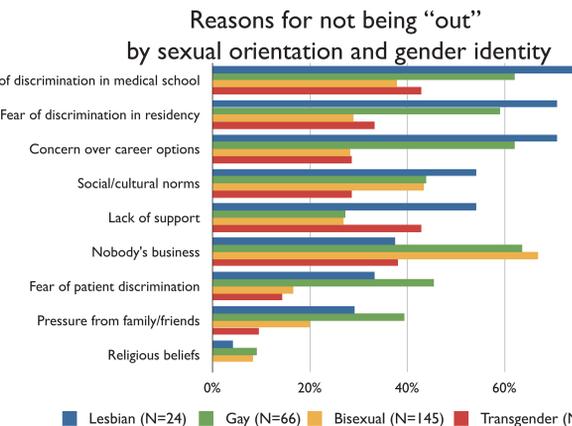
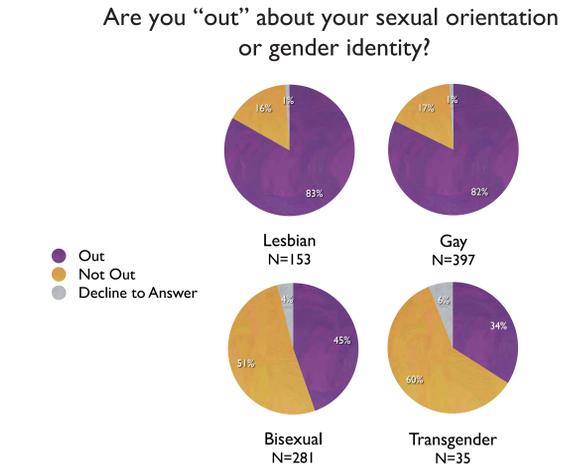
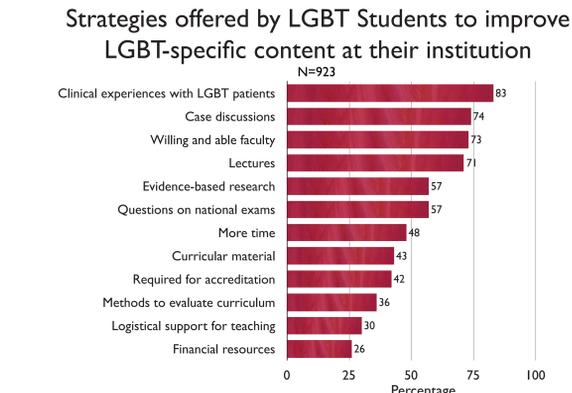
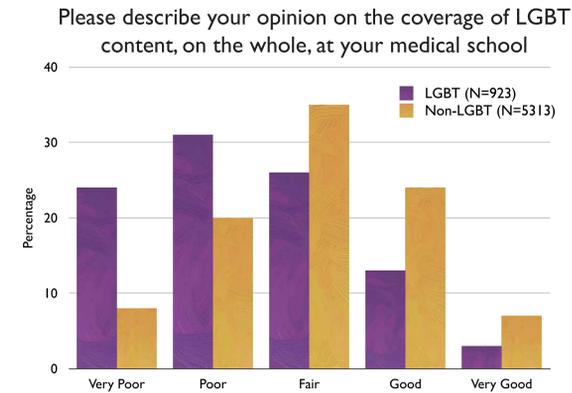
Only 33% of medical students planned to be out for their residency application. Of those who did not plan to be out:

- o 60% were concerned they would not be selected
- o 30% believed it was not relevant
- o 10% were concerned their medical school would be contacted

## Quantitative Results



## Quantitative Results



## Qualitative Results

**Sexual Orientation in Medical School:**  
"There is an assumption of my heterosexuality among my classmates. Several of the people in my small class are immature or from a conservative religious backgrounds. The small class size means that if I come out to the wrong person, I stand jeopardizing potentially useful professional relationships because they judge my sexuality rather than my abilities."

"When you work closely with a group of students for an extended amount of time on clerkships, you need to effectively work within a team. The amount of anti-gay banter that exists within my own group is enough for me to not come out to the other students on my rotation for fear that they will exclude me and/or reveal to attendings/residents what my sexual orientation is. In interacting with residents and attendings, it is clear through general conversation and offhand comments that LGBT is unfamiliar and, at best, a joke."

**Gender Identity in Medical School:**  
"At my school it has been okay to make jokes about non-traditional gender identities. For example, during my first semester we had a professor say during a lecture that if you have a male in your office but you see find an XX chromosome 'something is wrong'. He said this in a way that made it obvious that he felt was being funny, but it did two things, make me feel completely uncomfortable and teach my classmates to view transgender patients as wrong. Neither of which were very funny."

**Improving the Curriculum:**  
"I hadn't really thought about the lack of information regarding LGBT issues in medicine. In retrospect, my education didn't cover even a BIT of the topic - save for HIV/AIDS related discussions. I definitely think this information needs to be added to USMLE testing material so that it is then readily incorporated into basic medical school curriculums."

## Conclusions

1. LGBT medical students are more likely to be critical of their LGBT-specific education than their non-LGBT peers.
2. Most lesbian and gay students are out about their sexual orientation, but the majority of bisexual and transgender students hide their sexual orientation and gender identity.
3. LGBT medical students hide their sexual orientation and gender identity because they fear discrimination in medical school and residency and they feel the topic is "nobody's business".

Even though this population experiences significant challenges in medical school, their specific challenges are widely unknown in part because statistics on sexual orientation and transgender identity are not systematically collected by the AAMC and other national organizations. We recommend robust and longitudinal collection of such data to both study and support LGBT medical students.

## Partner Organizations

- American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine (AACOM)
- American Medical Association - Medical Student Section (AMA-MSS)
- American Medical Association (AMA) Advisory Committee on GLBT Issues
- American Medical Student Association (AMSA)
- Association of American Medical Colleges - Group on Student Affairs - Committee on Diversity Affairs (AAMC GSA-CODA)
- Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC)
- Canadian Federation of Medical Students (CFMS)
- Council of Osteopathic Student Government Presidents (COSGP)
- Gay & Lesbian Medical Association (GLMA)
- Student Osteopathic Medical Association

## People

- Members**
- Stephanie Brennan (M.D., 2013)
  - Eric Tran (M.F.A., 2012)
  - Wendy Caceres M.D.
  - Maggie Wells (M.D., 2014)
  - Lea Gee-Tong
  - William White, M.A. (M.D., 2014)
  - Elizabeth Goldsmith (M.S., M.D., 2012)
  - Jessi Humphreys (M.D., 2014)
  - Mitchell R. Lunn, M.D.
  - Matt Mansh (M.D., 2014)
  - Bradford Nguyen
  - Junjo Obedin-Halver, M.D., M.P.H.
  - Eliase Paradis, Ph.D., M.A.
  - Brett Smith-Hams
- Advisors**
- Lisa Chamberlain, M.D., M.P.H.
  - David Fetterman, Ph.D. (Fetterman & Associates)
  - Gabriel Garcia, M.D.
  - Andrew Nevins, M.D.

## References

- Schatz B, O'Hanlan KA. Anti-Gay Discrimination in Medicine: Results of a National Survey of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Physicians. San Francisco, CA: Gay and Lesbian Medical Association; 1994.
- Merchant RC, Jongco AM, and Woodward L. Disclosure of Sexual Orientation by Medical Students and Residency Applicants. Academic Medicine 2005; 80(8):786.