



Survey on experiences of 'Coming Out'

LIK:T carried out a survey on just under an 100 young lesbian and bisexual women in the Manchester area on their experiences of 'coming out'. The survey found that 86% of these women had 'come out' to most people in their lives, whilst the rest had 'come out' to someone close to them. The age that the respondents 'came out' ranged from eleven to thirty-six, although many women discussed coming out as 'process' that you 'gradually do over time'. For example, many women 'came out' firstly to their friends and then to their family or vice versa.

Overall the respondents were glad they had 'come out' even if they had found it 'difficult at the time'. Some stated the negative reactions that they faced when they first came out, such as their parents being 'shocked' or their friends being 'wary' of them for a while. However, these negative reactions were mainly short lived with most family members and friends 'coming round to the idea in the end'. Other reactions included the classic 'it is just a phase', this reaction seems to be widespread and on going for many of these women.

On the other hand, many had positive reaction from the friends, family or professionals that they came out to. A large proportion of the women surveyed talked about how 'supportive' their friends and family were. Some even found that their friends had already guessed they were gay or bisexual and one women's best friend reaction to her saying 'I'm gay' was 'Me too!'. Only one respondent discussed how she wished she had not come out as she was currently having 'a hard time from friends and family'.

The women explained how the most important things about coming out for them were that they could be 'true to themselves', 'not live a lie' and be 'accepted for who they really were'. Many women said they felt 'freer' since coming out and it gave them a sense of 'pride'. Through coming out some women had found new friends and were pleased that they could now introduce their girlfriend to their family. There was also a sense of needing to be 'visible' and out so that they could 'fight against prejudice'.

About half of the women surveyed came out at school. Many faced 'bullying' and 'homophobia' at school but most also commented on how 'great' their closed friends had been. The thing that these women viewed as most vital to reducing homophobia in society was in fact 'education'. Many discussed a need to 'teach gay and lesbian issues in school' to encourage 'acceptance', 'understanding' and 'to help gay people have a better image of themselves'. It was said that homophobia should be 'tackled head on in schools and not side lined'. 'Changes in the law', more 'acceptances in churches', better 'media portrayals' and more people 'being out' were also viewed as important in reducing homophobia.

Although most women discussed many positive things about 'coming out', they equally discussed how they believed it was very important for people to only come out 'if they wanted to', and to do it 'in their own time' and 'for themselves'.



Top Ten Tips for Coming Out

1. 'Don't be scared'
2. 'Speak to someone close to you'
3. 'Persevere'
4. 'Do it in your own time'
5. 'Do it for yourself'
6. 'Give parents time to get used to the idea'
7. 'Pick you time carefully'
8. 'Remember there is a lot of support out there'
9. 'Ignore small minds'
10. 'Don't do it during a row'