

## Introduction:

This lesson plan challenges you to consider how the Intercultural Development Continuum (IDC) stages function in real-life. In this activity, you will read a New York Times article from 1996 about gay rights in a small city that has several passages underlined (see citation below). While you are reading, you will note which stage of the IDC that passage portrays.

## Instructions:

1. Your facilitator will explain or review the Intercultural Development Continuum stages before distributing the article. The stages are Denial, Polarization, Minimization, Acceptance, and Adaptation.
2. Once your instructor signals, silently read through the article which begins on the second page of this handout. Use the document's margins to label each underlined passage with the stage of the Intercultural Development Continuum that it portrays.
3. When you are finished, tally up the number of times you named each orientation.
4. Your facilitator will go through each underlined passage and ask you to identify the labeled orientation and engage in a group discussion, posing the following questions:
  - How many times did you use each orientation?
  - How difficult was it to identify each orientation? Why?
  - How do the members of the communities treat difference?
  - Did any passages specifically stand out to you? Why?

Use the margin to label each underlined passage with the stage of the Intercultural Development Continuum it portrays.

In this small city rising out of the cornfields, two new attractions have opened on Main Street in the last year or so: a nightclub and a bookstore, both of them catering to lesbians and gay men.

A decade ago, there was almost no visible gay presence in Bloomington, a city of about 55,000. But a meeting in November for homosexuals interested in starting an advocacy group drew more than 150 people. And a proposal to ban discrimination against homosexuals, accompanied by the familiar backlash, goes before the City Council for a vote on Monday.

The community here is really starting to come alive," said Dave Bentlin, a 33-year-old gay accounting clerk, who is a leader of the Advocacy Council for Human Rights, the first such group for homosexuals in Bloomington.

Gay life and culture, traditionally a province of major urban centers, is beginning to thrive in smaller cities, towns and rural areas throughout the nation.

"The center of gravity in the gay and lesbian movement is shifting," said Robert Bray, a field director for the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, who has traveled more than 100,000 miles around the country as an organizer. "Small towns are where we're seeing the biggest changes right now. In the past, gays and lesbians from rural areas have picked up and escaped to big cities. They're not willing to do that anymore.

"Like everybody else, most of them don't want to live in big cities now. Instead, these native sons and daughters of small towns are keeping their roots, and making their presence felt."

Rapid City, S.D., has a new organization for gay people, he noted, and the southern Minnesota town of Marshall, population 12,000, has passed an antidiscrimination measure. Nebraska has a bill pending that would outlaw discrimination against homosexuals.

"I have seen with my own eyes a lesbian rancher in Arizona, a gay cop in the Badlands of South Dakota," Mr. Bray said. "Every rural area I have traveled through -- Laramie, Wyo.; Bloomington, Ill.; Caribou, Me. -- I have talked to gays. I have gotten media inquiries from reporters in 300 small towns, doing stories about gay people in their communities."

Mr. Bentlin, of the Bloomington advocacy group, said that in the past homosexuals here had few options. They could try to get in contact with the small gay community at Illinois State University in nearby Normal, or drive an hour to the more active gay life at the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana.

For some heterosexuals in Bloomington, the increased visibility of gay people has come as something of a shock.

**"They believed there weren't any gay people here, that they were all living away in some big city,"** said Jerry Pope, 37, who grew up on an Illinois farm, and kept his homosexuality a secret until three years ago. **"But we're your friends, your co-workers,**



**your fellow churchgoers. Some of my friends backed off for a while, but then they realized I was the same old Jerry, and they came around again."**

One of those was Travis Pearson, who said he initially **"felt like my best friend died."**

**But then Mr. Pearson, who is black, said he searched his soul. "It's like racism,"** he said.

Mr. Bray said a strong backlash typically occurs with the gains for homosexuals. And here in Bloomington, the debate has been shrill at times. The state chapter of the Christian Coalition has lobbied strongly against the antidiscrimination bill, sending City Council members a videotape called "The Gay Agenda," which focuses on particularly flamboyant dress and behavior of homosexuals at a gay pride parade.

Currently, 87 cities or counties have civil rights ordinances that extend protection to homosexuals, according to Mr. Bray's organization. Nine states -- California, Connecticut, Hawaii, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Vermont and Wisconsin -- have such laws.

In Bloomington, some supporters of the antidiscrimination measure say they have been hit with eggs. The homes of four opponents of the ordinance, including the Mayor's, have been spray-painted with the words "gay pride," though supporters of the measure insist their foes committed that vandalism in a ploy to win sympathy from the public. No arrests have been made.

Hundreds of letters have been sent to City Hall and to The Pantagraph, the daily newspaper in Bloomington.

"I've never seen anything like this in my 18 years in government," Mayor Jesse Smart said. "It's turned friend against friend. It's been so terribly divisive."

**Alderman George Kroutil, a retired plasterer, said that he had nothing personally against homosexuals -- "Hey, a nice gay fella lives across the alley from me" -- but that he could not support the measure.**

"My feelings are, you don't bother me and I won't bother you," he said. "I don't care what they do. I just don't want them to try to push their life style on me."

The ordinance was approved by the Human Relations Commission in a 5-to-1 vote. **Marc Miller, a commission member, described himself as a fundamentalist Christian who believes that homosexuality is immoral, but he nonetheless supports the civil rights protections.**

**"I spent a lot of time looking at the Bible," he said, adding that his decision was not popular with others at his church. "But I find it difficult to say that I want to impose Christian morality as law. Not everyone in our society is Christian. And their rights and views should be respected."**

He said he was especially persuaded by testimony at a hearing last November from homosexuals who said they feared losing their jobs if an employer learned of their sexual orientation.

The Mayor said letters to City Hall were running about 50-50 on the measure. Letters published in the newspaper, often as not, center on the Bible.

Opponents have tended to cite verses that condemned homosexuality. One letter in the newspaper urged the gay men and lesbians to turn away from sin. **"The good news is that those enslaved to homosexuality can be set free," the letter said.**

On the other side, a woman noted that the Bible seemed to excuse slavery and give men power over women. "Shall we defer to the man to make decisions for us because the Bible tells us to?" her letter to the newspaper said. "You can if you want, I'm not."

In the course of the debate, many homosexuals in Bloomington have asserted their sexuality for the first time. At least two were teen-agers. In one case, a young man was kicked out of a house and told never to return.

**In another case, a mother said she "felt like my life was over" when her son revealed that he was gay.**

**She called her parish priest, who told her, "He's the same sweet kid he was this morning."**

All of her life, she said, she had believed that homosexuals were "weird and perverted." Determined to understand more, she went to the bookstore run by two lesbians, Once Upon a Time Alternative Books and Gifts.

**"I wanted to see what they looked like," she said. "I walked in and looked at these two women. They looked just like me. I started to cry and said, 'I need help.' They sat down with me and got me some coffee and talked with me about my son."**

For lesbians and gay men everywhere, there are always risks of betrayal, condemnation and discrimination. But in a small town, living life in the open can be even more fraught with anxiety. Many people who live a generally open life in Bloomington, for example, said they were not willing to see their names or pictures in a newspaper because their parents still did not know, or pretended not to know.

**"It's this kind of game of make-believe," one man explained. "They know about me, I'm sure. They must. I think. But they've never heard it from me. So they don't have to confront it totally. And if that's what they need, I'll give it to them."**

Another man, who also requested anonymity to protect his parents, said he wanted to avoid the nightmare experienced by a friend. "He came out to his mother, and two weeks later, she died of a stroke," he said. "He's convinced that he killed her by telling her."

### **Tally the times each orientation is identified above:**

**DENIAL:**

**POLARIZATION:**

**MINIMIZATION:**

**ACCEPTANCE:**

**ADAPTATION:**