

# verdadera

## SEXUAL IDENTITY APRIL 2012

The Verdadera staff encourages you to discuss and explore the issues and stories, as the publication aims not only to offer an outlet for expression, but to improve our lives. Keep in mind that the emotions that flow through the text and the feelings behind the words could be those of your child, your classmate, or your best friend.

### THINGS TO CONSIDER:

- What does sexual identity mean to you?
- Do you judge people based on their sexual identity?
- Do you feel a need to have the same views on sexual identity as those around you?

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## STUDENT SUBMISSIONS

**H**ow do you define your sexual identity? How are you supposed to know, in high school, whether you like men or women or both or no one? I think it's so terrifying to have to figure it out and it'd be nice to talk to my mom about it but she is strictly anti - "anything not purely straight". It's like she doesn't even want me to be straight though, because she flips out if I talk about any girls. Not even dating them or taking them to a dance. Just any girls. Parents, your kids are going to have sex. They are human beings, and they're going to start wanting to experiment soon enough. You might think it's wrong, but we're from a different generation. Please, just teach us how to be safe and then let us go.

"Be who you are and say what you feel, because those who mind don't matter and those who matter don't mind."

—Dr. Seuss

**O**ne of the things I hate most about sexual identity is how it conflicts with religion. Personally, I'm

Christian and straight, so nothing really all conflicting and crazy for me. But when it gets down to the question of legalizing gay marriage, or even day to day attitude that I should have on gays, I'm a little confused. I remember when there was that huge debate on whether or not California should legalize gay marriage, my family was talking about it. All of them, every single one of them, said no, it's not allowed, we're Christian, that's just not acceptable. Don't get me wrong, they don't hate gays or anything, but they just didn't want to legalize marriage. I was pretty little back then but I remember being really confused. If God loves us that much, wouldn't he want us to do what we want to do as long as it's right and moral? And I still have that question today. The Bible does say that being gay is a sin, that it is a crime against nature, but personally, I'm all for gay marriage. And for gay rights. Because I still believe that if God loves us that much, loves us enough to forgive sinners and murderers, as long as they ask for it, then why would He have problems with people's sexual identity, especially if they are still moral and kind and considerate?

Going to Monta Vista, being of Asian heritage, and being girl all aspects that limit me in finding my “sexual identity.” It would be okay if my values prevented me from wanting to find my sexual identity at my age, but they don’t. I believe that high school and college are the time to figure out who you are in all aspects, not after you’re stuck in an arranged marriage. Not being able to freely date, without sneaking behind my parents back, has left me unfocused on the actual experience for my attention is inevitably diverted to wondering whether or not my parents are looming over my head. So I don’t know what my sexual identity is, not yet. And I hope that I don’t end up finding it too late.

“Human identity is the most fragile thing that we have, and it's often only found in moments of truth.”  
—Alan Rudolph

**A** while back, I met this girl from Colorado who was saying many stereotypical arguments against gay marriage. How gays should fix themselves. How gays should stop spreading their way of life. How gays should just stop.

It made me uncomfortable. Not because I am gay but because I live in the bay area. I am convinced gay marriage should be legal but homosexuality is such a polarizing issue; it worries me how people use it against each other.

When prop 8 was a big issue, I felt many anti-gay people were segregated at mv. I wish it wasn't so frustrating to listen to anti gays and want to slap them for their intolerance. I know it is barbaric and slightly intolerant of me to feel that way. But I do.

Once I got in an argument with my anti gay uncle and began crying. I only know like three gay people! Why do I care so much?

“What is straight? A line can be straight, or a street, but the human heart, oh, no, it's curved like a road through mountains.”

—Tennessee Williams

**M**y history teacher called herself a Belle on the first day of school. I asked her what she meant.

She was joking, of course, but once I found out what she was referring to, I began reading articles about the chivalric subculture of the south and wondered how it could be the focal point of America’s extravagance and also its oppression. I wondered why the South bred and inspired some of the greatest writers: Faulkner, Capote, Morrison and Twain. While exploring the South through its literature, I found Williams’ plays, lively examinations of family, class, alcoholism and, as Brick Pollitt himself declares in “Cat on a Hot Tin Roof”, “mendacity!

For me, Cat was Williams’ way of showing what it meant to be gay, to be an “empty shell.” Brick could never bring himself to even say the word “gay;” he just referred to it as “being like that” and this denial that taunted Brick, that made him ignore his suicidal and true lover—those same feelings, they taunted me. I even became uncomfortable whenever anyone pronounced the word algae, “al-gay.” Williams took the notions of societal expectation, and using the South as his stage, brought them to an entirely new level, one which made me face uncomfortable but necessary truths about myself.

“Why is it that, as a culture, we are more comfortable seeing two men holding guns than holding hands?”

—Earnest Gaines

**I** don’t see what the big deal is. If I’m straight or gay, if I am a girl and feel like I guy. I don’t see how it is any of your business. I think I’m straight, but I don’t see the big deal with liking, loving

someone of the same gender. I don't see how people think that they have the right to tell you who you can love. A person coming to earth I'm sure would see a pretty big problem in our society, where marrying an ex-convict, or even a vampire is more socially accepted than even loving someone of the same gender with a 4.0 GPA and a degree from Yale. I think people need to learn. To be taught what being LGBTQ really is. I think I'm straight, but in terms of my life and my friends, and what I want, I don't see how that is relevant.

"The important thing is not the object of love, but the emotion itself."

—Gore Vidal

One of the things I hate most about sexual identity is how it conflicts with religion. Personally, I'm Christian and straight, so nothing really all conflicting and crazy for me. But when it gets down to the question of legalizing gay marriage, or even day to day attitude that I should have on gays, I'm a little confused. I remember when there was that huge debate on whether or not California should legalize gay marriage, my family was talking about it. All of them, every single one of them, said no, it's not allowed, we're Christian, that's just not acceptable. Don't get me wrong, they don't hate gays or anything, but they just didn't want to legalize marriage. I was pretty little back then but I remember being really confused. If God loves us that much, wouldn't he want us to do what we want to do as long as it's right and moral? And I still have that question today. The Bible does say that being gay is a sin, that it is a crime against nature, but personally, I'm all for gay marriage. And for gay rights. Because I still believe that if God loves us that much, loves us enough to forgive sinners and murderers, as long as they ask for it, then why would He have problems with people's sexual identity, especially if they are still moral and kind and considerate?

"Labels are for filing. Labels are for clothing. Labels are not for people."

—Martina Navratilova

How do you define your sexual identity? How are you supposed to know, in high school, whether you like men or women or both or no one? I think it's so terrifying to have to figure it out and it'd be nice to talk to my mom about it but she is strictly anti - "anything not purely straight". It's like she doesn't even want me to be straight though, because she flips out if I talk about any girls. Not even dating them or taking them to a dance. Just any girls. Parents, your kids are going to have sex. They are human beings, and they're going to start wanting to experiment soon enough. You might think it's wrong, but we're from a different generation. Please, just teach us how to be safe and then let us go.

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I am.... a sexual person. I don't know how to say it, but I am. I have needs, and yeah, I get frustrated. I don't understand how other people don't! I mean we're teenagers, we're hormones, it's natural. Some people can be so uptight about it though and I am so mystified by them. Really, you've never wanted to do something with someone else? You've never dreamed about it? It's not a crime. I wish that people would come to terms their sexuality (I don't mean orientation) so that I can feel fully comfortable with mine.

"Who would give a law to lovers? Love is unto itself a higher law."

—Boethius

I am very sure about my sexual identity. I am a 15 year old male and I am attracted to females and

only females. Some other sexual identities people might choose to identify with are being gay, lesbian, or bisexual. There are probably more that I don't know about. In our modern world, sexual identity is huge topic. Especially with cases like the Tyler Clementi case over at Rutgers University recently. Lots of people get discriminated against for their sexual identity. Mostly its gay people. At school, the word gay has become synonymous with something weird or undesirable. I myself am guilty of using the word gay in a negative connotation just because I have become so used to it. Even I have been discriminated against because of my sexual identity. I am straight but If I did something feminine or not considered manly, people would call me gay. I have nothing against or for gay people. I don't have anything against or for straight people. I don't have anything against or for lesbians. I don't have anything against or for bisexuals. But I am totally for having the right to do what you want and live your life how you want. People need to stop discriminating against others for their sexual identity. Its THEIR identity and so its THEIR choice.

"Never be bullied into silence. Never allow yourself to be made a victim. Accept no one's definition of your life; define yourself."

—Harvey Fierstein

Sexual identity? Hmm. Never really thought much about it before, but I guess it really is a big part of our life now that I come to think of it. Personally, the closest I've ever gotten to sexual identity is talking about how hot Leonardo DiCaprio was in Titanic with my friends. But I suppose sexual identity is more than just about whether you like boys or girls, but about whether you're proud of who you are.

"It is not easy to find happiness in ourselves, and it is not possible to find it elsewhere."

—Agnes Repplier

The world is composed of many different types of people. People of different ethnicities, colors, and religions. Everyone comes from someplace where there are different values and traditions. We usually accept people from these backgrounds and places, as long as they are what we deem to be "normal." How is normal even defined? Im gonna be a nerd and give you the dictionary definition for it. Normal is defined as: "Conforming to a standard; usual, typical, or expected." This is what normal is. Then everyone who studies at Monta Vista and the people who created Microsoft and Apple are not normal. They didn't conform to regular standard. But everyone seems to be ok with it. However, when any topic about bisexual, gay, lesbian or transgender people comes up, the awkwardness in the room could literally kill. What's wrong with being ANY of these things? It's just like any other "label", right? It's like being a PC or Mac. It's not a big deal. Or you could be both. Why not? The way I see it, God has made everyone equal and we should accept people the way they are. I am probably the biggest freak ever. I laugh at my own jokes (no matter how bad they are), and I can say the wrong things at the wrong times. But I am still accepted (at least I hope so...). We shouldn't be judging other people on the way THEY are, but we should be trying to improve ourselves to accept that everyone is different and it doesn't matter what you really think about people who are not "normal" because I ASSURE you, every single person that goes to MV is FAR from normal.

"You'll never find peace of mind until you listen to your heart"

—George Michael

# A WORD FROM THE PROFESSIONAL



Dr. Burdge is a licensed psychologist with a private practice in Menlo Park. In her practice she specializes in LGBT issues, Anxiety Issues and Trauma. She works with teens and adults and leads groups on various topics. As a scholar she has pursued research related to peace activism within a cross-cultural context. [www.sarahburdgephd.com](http://www.sarahburdgephd.com)

Adolescence is a time of exploration and transformation on so many fronts. Teens' minds, values and bodies are evolving all at once and there is the knowing that at the end of this teen journey is full adulthood with all its benefits and responsibilities. Developing one's sexual identity is one piece of this evolution.

Sexual identity can be defined as an individual's internal sense of whom, when and how one is drawn into intimate and/or sexual connection with another person. As a teen's body matures inclusive of newly developing sexual desires it can be confusing and terrifying to sort out right action that is true to a given teen's identity and social and familial expectations and values. I like the analogy of each teen needing to create their own patch work quilt of identity where they are tasked with hand choosing each part of the pattern that fits for all the varied aspects of who they are.

When I met with the students in preparation for this article I was honored by their dedication to honest dialogue and their willingness to name and explore various dilemmas associated with sexual identity. Topics of discussion ranged from what is sexual identity, to religion and homosexuality, to fears around sexuality, to desires to accept those who are different, and many more. I will address a few of these topics in this article to guide further exploration and discussion for students and their parents.

For starters, I will present some basic facts. It is commonly accepted scientific knowledge that varied sexual identities are normal. All cultures throughout

time have had within them individuals with varied sexual and gender identities. Some cultures have within them ways of embracing individuals with all of these varied identities. For example, Native American cultures revered transgender individuals as they were thought to have special spiritual powers

since they embodied BOTH their female and male parts of their spirits. Transgender individuals in these cultures were often trained as healers, married, and often adopted orphaned children if they could not have their own. Another example is the prevalence of male homosexuality historically in Persian and some Asian cultures as the highest status and most desired sexual relationships. In these cultures, heterosexual relationships were solely for procreation and romantic, intimate relationships were homosexual. There are many more examples but suffice it to say that varied sexual and gender identities are normal variations on humanness. However, cultures

and religions have very divergent attitudes towards these normal variations.

It is also important to recognize that sexuality and gender exist along a spectrum and includes many variables. Who we are drawn to be intimate with involves all aspects of ourselves including our bodies, emotions, spiritual self's, community self's, etc.. Coming to know our own sexual identity is about understanding our inclinations in all these areas. This is where the patch work quilt comes in again as we may feel ourselves to be at different points on the spectrum in these different areas.

## theLOWDOWN

websites for parents and teens

- The Gay-Straight Alliance: Educational and support groups in educational settings to promote education about homophobia and sexual identity issues. <http://www.gsanetwork.org/>

- Project Outlet: LGBTQQ teen resources and activities <http://www.projectoutlet.org/>

- Billie DeFrank Center: Teen and Youth LGBT Center in San Jose <http://www.defrankcenter.org/>

- Religious Tolerance: [www.religioustolerance.org](http://www.religioustolerance.org)

Many students brought up the issue of religion and sexuality. Adolescence is also a time of value exploration. Many teens are starting to want a deeper understanding of their parents and their own values. This can be scary and can create conflict within families. It is my hope that parents can provide non-judgmental spaces for dialogue with their teens to help foster thoughtful development of values. For instance, we hear everywhere in the media and gossip that the Bible says that homosexuality is a sin. There are 613 commandments in the Bible, the vast majority of which are no longer practiced due to the reality that they do not fit with our current cultures. Examples would be the commandment that it is forbidden to castrate any male animals, or one cannot drink milk at the same meal as meat. I encourage parents to help their teens understand how your family chooses its values as there are many divergent interpretations of the Bible.

Many students expressed a desire to not be judgmental or stigmatizing towards LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual, Transgender) individuals. This is a brave and scary position to take at times and one that I applaud in the students. Standing up for the rights of minorities is not easy. Being willing to speak against hate speech takes courage. It is an important part of teen development to refine one's core values and to practice advocating for them in the world, despite peer pressure to conform. Peer pressure is such a powerful force that many teens keep their personal values quiet and act in the world according to peer pressure. This

is natural and easy to do and as a teen approaches adulthood they will naturally want to have a stronger voice for their newly emerging values.

Which brings me to the parents! Parents, this is such a rich developmental time in your child's life. They are becoming full adults and actively creating their passions, hobbies, scholastic aptitudes, sports interests, circles of friends, spiritual practices, and identities on all levels including sexual. Most of the students in the meeting group and submissions expressed an interest in having parents or other trusted adults to talk to and ask questions of about sexuality issues. This can be awkward for many parents and is even taboo in some cultures. However, remember that your teen is growing up in Silicon Valley and they are bombarded daily by media, movies, gossip, etc. that contains ideas and images of sexuality. Most of them know LGBT people. They are educated about the religious and political debates around sexuality issues. They are pressured to be sexual beings by the media and fashion industry. Making sure your teen has at least one safe space to talk about sexuality and sexual identity will help them navigate this confusing bombardment of information. If you, as a parent, come from a culture with different values than is present in the media then openly discuss this with your student.

Being in intimate relationship is a powerful core part of the human life cycle. Exploring what one's identity is within this area will help teens be prepared for a fulfilling meaningful life.

## 2011-2012 ISSUES

**AUGUST** body image

**SEPTEMBER** letting go, moving on

**OCTOBER** competition & academic stress

**NOVEMBER** morals & values

**JANUARY** purpose in life

**FEBRUARY** betrayal

**MARCH** media influence

**APRIL** sexual identity

**MAY** encouragement

**JUNE** innocence and maturity