



## Research: Role-Models

Nearly half (48%) of LGBT youth actively seek out role models to help compensate for a lack of supportive family members and positive gay influences in their lives (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2004).

Anderson (1998) indicates that gay youth have less formal and informal social support than their straight peers. A direct cause of this might be the fact that gay youth are more likely to lose important supportive relationships when they reveal their sexual orientation. They need positive role models during this crucial time!

"LGB youth need to learn that they are not the only ones with same-sex attractions, but that there are mentally healthy, admired and respectable people who have similar sexual attractions. By having positive role models in their everyday lives and in the media... LGB youth learn that their sexuality is in the mainstream" (Cohen & Savin Willimas, 1996 as quoted in Grossman & D'Augelli, 2004, p. 85).

LGBT youth are still learning how to be "out." They need examples of what it means to be successful, grounded, and gay. Speizer (1981) says a role model is a person who "possesses skills and displays techniques which the actor lacks... and from whom, by observation and comparison with his own performance, the actor can learn" (p. 693). By setting a positive example for LGBT youth, Homecoming Project role models help you learn how to live successful, healthy lives.

Flowers and Buston (2001) suggest that the silence surrounding gay issues in high schools (and other potentially "homophobic" places) makes it extremely difficult for gay males to find other boys who are having similar experiences. As a result, they lack the supportive relationships they need, leaving them feeling isolated and alone. By introducing gay youth to real-world, hard-working, average LGBT people, we show them that they are normal, acceptable, and have access to a loving community that will accept them.

According to Grossman and D'Augelli (2004), if LGBT youth are not given positive, relatable role models, they may never consider themselves as "normal" and "socially acceptable." Instead, they may forever see themselves as part of a small, isolated group. Homecoming Project role models help LGBT youth develop a healthy social identity!

"GLBT youth commonly do not see themselves reflected in their families, among their neighbors, or within their faith communities. Positive role models are not nearly so easily visible and available for them as they are for heterosexual youth" (Morrow, 2004, p. 92).

Aside from family members, youth most often choose celebrities as role models. The benefits gained from having a role model are much higher when the youth has direct contact with these supportive, successful adults. "Lack of exposure to powerful and socially constructive adults outside the family likely governs the less optimal role model choices of lower-income teens" (Yancey, Siegel, & McDaniel, 2002, p. 55).

Youth who can identify someone they “admire or look up to” (ie. a role model) earn higher grades, have higher self esteem, and show stronger ethnic identity. “Furthermore, all these effects [are] magnified when teens with a known role model [are] compared with teens who [do not] identify a role model” (Yancey, et. al, 2002, p. 60). Let Live Out Loud introduce your LGBT students to a role model!