



HBO's The Out List: Discussion and Activity Guide

Purpose: The following guide is an opportunity for students to 'meet' virtual LGBTQ role models and engage in discussion regarding issues pertaining to the community.

I. Discussion Questions: Use the following discussion questions as a starting point for student journal entries, small group discussions, or whole-class conversations.

Neil Patrick Harris, Actor

1. Neil describes the pressures of having to be "masculine" in American society. Why do we put such an emphasis on defining what's masculine and feminine? In what ways are these stereotypes perpetuated?
2. Do you think out LGBTQ actors can play heterosexual characters in television and film?
3. Neil makes the argument that middle America, now more than ever, is able to view diversity through television by being exposed to LGBTQ characters. Do you agree with this statement? In your opinion, is LGBTQ representation on TV positive or negative?

Janet Mock, Writer and Transgender Activist

1. Janet mentions wanting to "blend in" as well as having an urge to speak out. In your opinion, should the goal of the LGBTQ community be to "blend in" or stand out?
2. Janet says that, "Transgender people are casualties in this fight." Have transgender individuals been left out of the LGBTQ movement? Why is transgenderism difficult for many people to understand?
3. What is the difference between gender and sexuality? In what ways does our society place an importance on each?

Dustin Lance Black, Screenwriter

1. Dustin refers to his experiences in the Mormon Church and recounts hearing the phrase, "homosexuality is a sin" often. What impact does language have on people?
2. Dustin identifies as a gay-filmmaker. Do you think it's important to separate sexual identity from all other areas of our identity? Or, as Dustin suggests, are they so interconnected that it's impossible for them to be disconnected?
3. He describes LGBTQ individuals as being treated as "second class citizens." In what ways does our country treat LGBTQ citizens as second class citizens?

Lupe Valdez, Sheriff of Dallas County

1. In her testimony, Lupe describes being a woman, Latino, and a lesbian. What are some similarities and differences between these diverse identities? How can we compare their history?
2. Lupe describes her spirituality as being crucial to her coming out process. In what ways can spirituality and religious institutions work together with the LGBTQ community?
3. Lupe recounts a story where a mother thanked her for being a role model for her gay son. Why are LGBTQ role models important for LGBTQ youth?

Wade Davis, Former NFL Player

1. Wade uses the term “straight-acting.” Many gay men are not comfortable with this term. Why might this be problematic when defining the characteristics of gay men?
2. Wade says that upon coming out, his mom said, “I just need time.” Do you think acceptance of LGBTQ people is a generational-issue?
3. In your opinion, do LGBTQ athletes have an obligation to come out publicly?

R. Clarke Cooper, Executive Director of Log Cabin Republicans

1. Clarke states that someone once asked him, “When did you become a gay?” Why do some people still think being LGBTQ is a choice?
2. Why might it seem hard to reconcile conservative political views with being gay?
3. Do you think people have an obligation and duty to the community to be out?

Lady Bunny, Drag Performer

1. Do gender expression and sexuality need to be linked? Is it possible to see gender identity and sexual identity as two separate entities?
2. Lady Bunny says that, “This is about me and how I want to dress.” Do you think schools should be more open to gender-bending and letting students express themselves in whatever ways they want?
3. What are the different ways that people can advocate for LGBTQ rights?

Larry Kramer, Playwright and Activist

1. Larry Kramer’s ACT UP was integral in drawing attention to the HIV/AIDS crisis in the 1980’s when the government refused to acknowledge the epidemic. What do you think we can learn from the lessons of LGBTQ history?
2. Larry Kramer says that “anger is a wonderful emotion.” What are the different ways that LGBTQ people can channel their frustrations into productive activities?
3. A new study indicates that HIV rates are up among young men. Why do you think the rate of HIV diagnoses has increased in recent years?

Wanda Sykes, Comedienne

1. What can we learn from Wanda Sykes about how to let go of anxieties that may hold us back and embrace identities that will help us grow?
2. How might the experiences of LGBTQ people from different racial backgrounds be different from one another?
3. How are the everyday lives of LGBTQ people the most political possessions they have?

Christine Quinn, *Politician*

1. What role does the LGBTQ politician have in the progression of the LGBTQ movement? Do LGBTQ politicians have an obligation to advocate for the community?
2. Quinn talks a lot about marriage equality. In your opinion, is marriage equality the most important issue facing the LGBTQ community?
3. In 10 years, where will the LGBTQ movement be? How will things have progressed?

Jake Shears, *Musician*

1. Jake uses the term “homo.” What are the different labels that LGBTQ people apply to each other and how might these labels carry different meanings?
2. How might claiming LGBTQ identity in a public performance space, like a music concert, be a political statement?
3. Jake says that, “being on the outside gives you an incredible perspective.” What diverse perspectives does being LGBTQ provide?

Wazina Zondon, *Teacher*

1. Wazina identifies as “queer.” Many people have problems with the word ‘queer’ due to its history as a pejorative. Wazina argues that it needs to be reclaimed. In your opinion, is queer an appropriate term of identification? What does it mean to different people?
2. What is the difference between homosocial and homosexual culture?
3. Wazina mentions the conversation with her father after coming out. How might our biggest critics also be our biggest supporters?

Ellen Degeneres, *Comedienne*

1. When Ellen came out she says she lost her show and her career. Even amid the challenges, what might she have gained from the experience?
2. Ellen says we need to be “a little more visible.” In what ways can the LGBTQ community be more visible?
3. How do we create a more gentle, caring world?

Suze Orman, *Financial Advisor*

1. Suze describes her experiences working as a woman in the financial world. What challenges might an LGBTQ person face being out in the workplace?
2. What does it say that the United States of America does not grant full legal rights to same-sex couple while other nations do?

3. In what other ways, aside from the issue of marriage, have LGBTQ people been oppressed?

Twiggy Pucci Garcon, *Community Health Specialist*

1. In what ways do LGBTQ people create family and community outside of their nuclear families?
2. Twiggy uses the term “gender fluid.” What does it mean to be gender fluid and how does society make it difficult to be gender fluid?
3. In what ways can the LGBTQ community better support one another?

Cynthia Nixon, *Actress*

1. Cynthia brings up misconceptions about what it means to be bisexual. Why do people have a hard time understanding that bisexuality is a legitimate sexual identity?
2. How does the LGBTQ community form coalitions with other groups to achieve universal goals?
3. Cynthia states that, “It can’t be us and them anymore.” How do the LGBTQ and straight communities work together to become “we?”

II. Debate Activity

One of the overarching issues brought up in “The Out List,” and discussed by many of the LGBTQ role models, is about LGBTQ visibility and normalization in society. Many argue that, as a community, we should be visible and remain ‘different’ while others argue that normalization and fitting into the mainstream is the ultimate goal. Have students engage in an organized debate revolving around the central question, “Should the LGBTQ community seek visibility or integration into the mainstream?”

III. Supplemental Activities

1. Create your own “Role Model List” at your school! Create a short video interviewing adults, students, staff, etc at your school who are making it a safer and more accepting place for everyone. If you don’t have access to a camera, interview each participant and put together a newsletter or mini-book! Here are some possible questions to ask:
 - a. What experiences in your life have challenged you? What did you learn from these experiences?
 - b. Who was the first LGBTQ person you met and what impact did they have on you?
 - c. Why do you think role models are important for LGBTQ youth? Are role models important for LGBTQ individuals?
 - d. How can students and staff make our school a safer place for everyone?

2. Larry Kramer makes the statement that “Anger is a wonderful emotion, if you do it right.” Indicate to students that they have the opportunity to write a letter to the editor of a local paper and get angry. Ask them to identify an important issue brought up in “The Out List” and create a short letter to the editor identifying what it is that they are upset about. Make sure that they provide a solution!

3. In the documentary, many of the speakers had specific language that they used to describe themselves and the LGBTQ community collectively such as: queer, gender fluid, straight-acting, etc. These terms sometimes come with loaded connotations. As a group, create your own LGBTQ dictionary with terms that you might use to describe your gender or sexual orientation. Illustrate your dictionary so that the dictionary can represent these terms visually.