

Spring 2012

NHWI

GenderGender Ambassadors Panel (GAP):
Contemporary Gender Equality Listening Session Report
for the Lesbian Community in Concord, NH

NARAL Offices 18 Low Street, Concord, NH

Authors | Ellen Koenig, Jennifer Alford-Teaster

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About the New Hampshire's Women's Initiative (NHWI):

The New Hampshire Women's Initiative (NHWI) is a new non-profit organization dedicated to continuing the legacy of success of our merging partners: the Commission on the Status of Women, the Women's Lobby and Alliance, and the Women's Policy Institute. The NHWI mission is to advance social, economic, and political opportunity and equality for women in New Hampshire.

The NHWI has a unique governance structure. Its board is supported by both a Founding Mothers' Panel, comprised of the founders of the merging partners, and a Gender Ambassadors Panel, a group of young women leaders who are interested in better understanding and re-framing the dialogue around gender equality issues in New Hampshire. This multi-generational sphere of influence will help the NHWI leverage both the rich history and accomplishment surrounding women's issues in New Hampshire and at the same time craft a new path forward for gender equality born out of contemporary thinking and needs.

About the Gender Ambassadors Panel (GAP):

The goal of the Gender Ambassadors Panel (GAP) is support the mission of the NHWI by informing its research, outreach, and advocacy with a better understanding of the gender equality issues that younger women and men identify as important to them. GAP members will work toward that goal by hosting Contemporary Gender Equality Listening Sessions in various geographic locations around the State. The Listening Sessions will be facilitated focus groups consisting of six to ten participants engaged in a formal discussion for up to ninety minutes using pre-determined questions. Results will be documented and shared with the NHWI Board. The Listening Session participants will come primarily from the existing networks of GAP members and are expected to be primarily women, however the method can be adapted to reach other networks and populations, including men.

About the Network Facilitators:

The first round of listening session hosted by GAP members took place in the fall of 2011. The listening sessions generated so much interest that participants, board members, and other colleagues wanted to be a part of the process and host their own sessions! The NHWI Board and GAP members enthusiastically support this extension of the listening sessions to others in our community. Network Facilitators use the same facilitation packet, including the note takers table, and draft a report based on the content of their session.

About the Authors:

Ellen Koenig is a board member of NHWI and has worked in the NH Nonprofit Sector for the past 30 years, having spent 10 years at the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation and currently at the New Hampshire Center for Nonprofits. Ellen resides in Concord with her family.

Jennifer Alford-Teaster, MA, MPH is a board member of NHWI, a native of Durham, NH and lives in Concord. Jennifer works as a Senior Research Support Specialist at the New England Center for Emergency Preparedness (NECEP) in the Dartmouth Medical School (DMS). Jennifer’s research focuses on developing medical surge plans for rural communities in the event of catastrophic emergency.

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Introduction and Background

Throughout the listening sessions in New Hampshire, Concord has had the honor of hosting a couple of different sessions. This session is devoted to the unique concerns of the Lesbian community.

Typically, for the listening session reports the report writer will create a summary of demographics for the community in which they are reporting on. The challenge with drafting a demographic profile with the gay community is that there are no formally recorded statistics within the US Census for the lesbian community. However, a review of the newly created U.S. Census Same Sex Couples data from the American Community Survey reveals that approximately 1% of NH households are same-sex couples. However, New Hampshire has seen one of the greatest rises in same-sex spousal households since the 2000 Census.

This is a rapidly growing community in New Hampshire that faces many of the same issues faced by all New Hampshire citizens in regard to gender equality including equal pay for equal work and gender bias. However, the lesbian community has unique challenges facing them which include safety in their community, marriage equality, and equity in the military, among others and this report only provides a glimpse of the complex issues of concern for lesbian women.

The location for the listening session is NARAL Offices 18 Low Street, Concord, NH.

Methods:

Gaining insight into a community with the use of focus groups is a commonly used approach to qualitative research. Qualitative research is a systematic approach to understanding human thoughts, behaviors and motivations through thoughtful survey design, observation and inquiry.

The GAP Listening Sessions are designed like focus groups where a facilitator and note-taker work together to gain insight into participant's thoughts and feelings about contemporary gender equality issues facing young women and men in NH.

Prior to conducting the listening sessions, each facilitator and note-taker is provided a facilitation packet that details instructions for conducting an effective focus group. This includes instructions for the specific roles of the facilitator and note-taker, the length of the session and how to draft the report after the listening session.

Location

NARAL Offices 18 Low Street, Concord, NH

Participant Background

Four participants joined the discussion ranging in age from 29 – 55.

The women's occupations range from non-profit work, to academia, and state government.

While the session was hosted in Concord, NH, a centrally located office, the women drove from the southern and coastal areas of New Hampshire to participate.

Lesbian Listening Session Format

The listening session followed a traditional focus group format, which included a two to three minute allotment per question, per person. Each session was designed to last two hours including introductions, participant feedback, a participant exercise, and concluding remarks.

The Listening Session was conducted using an agenda and script provided in the facilitation packet (Appendix A: Listening Session Script). The session began promptly at 4:30pm with introductions of the facilitator, note-taker and the participants. The participants introduced themselves by first name, occupation, age, and town of residence.

Summary of Findings:

The Summary of Findings is organized by each question asked at the listening session. Synthesis of material will occur at a later date when all of the listening sessions have been conducted. Please note that participants are identified only by a number to protect their privacy.

QUESTION #1: What brought you here tonight?

Participant	Comment	Note-taker observation
1	<p>As a favor to [redacted]</p> <p>This participant relayed a story about a young man that was following the marriage equality vote. This story had a profound effect on this participant.</p> <p>This participant is curious due to involvement in the past with the collaborative efforts</p>	<p>Many of the participants came because of a request from a colleague for whom they respect, but they were quick to also qualify the remark by saying that they want to be involved in the discussions taking place statewide.</p>

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	<p>of the merging organizations.</p> <p>She would like to be a part of the discussion without having to commit too much time.</p>	
2	<p>As a favor to [redacted].</p> <p>Intrigued by the possibility to have a voice across the state through the listening sessions.</p> <p>It isn't often that this participant gets to put in her thoughts regarding her age, gender, and sexuality.</p> <p>Underlying, this is the desire to affect change.</p>	
3	<p>As a favor to Participant 2.</p> <p>Has had a long working history in gender equality issues.</p> <p>She has been involved with the policy development related to gender issues for companies.</p> <p>It has been a while since she has had an opportunity to express her feelings and is looking forward to contributing to the discussion.</p>	
4	<p>As a favor to Participant 2.</p> <p>Has been involved with these processes before which tend</p>	<p>The group appears to agree with the comment regarding what counts as women's</p>

	<p>to be either a combative situation or a token address.</p> <p>There are women's issues and there are lesbian issues.</p> <p>There is this notion that what gets to count as women's issues and usually means something related to children.</p> <p>The discussion typically revolves around some whining and this participant would like to have a positive influence on the discussion. This participant would like to see the discussion broaden to the facts about gender representation across the state.</p>	<p>issues.</p>
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QUESTION #2: How do you define gender equality?

Participant	Comment	Note-taker observation
1	<p>If we are going to talk about gender equality, then we can gender expression.</p> <p>To me gender is a broad topic. There is a whole group of people who don't fit into what you would traditionally fit into what you would talk about when you talk about gender equality.</p>	<p>There is some uncertainty about what this question means.</p>

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	<p>This topic can include anyone. I don't know how to talk about it because I don't have the language to talk about it.</p> <p>I don't like having to identify. I get resentful when I have to write down my gender.</p> <p>My partner definitely does not – this is sensitive stuff – have the courage to go to the place that she wants to in terms of gender expression. She would like to not have to identify as a woman, and it has caused a whole lot of issues for her. It is starting to come out in the relationship, but doesn't get talked about extensively.</p> <p>Individuals in this demographic need to be part of this discussion.</p>	
2	<p>I have a more negative definition of gender equality.</p> <p>I grew up with all boys. This continued athletically for me throughout school. I was expected to do well in school, and it came easy to me.</p> <p>Academic athletic were 50/1 ratio. It was that much more women to men. I was pushed</p>	<p>Participant 1 indicated that she has experienced age discrimination.</p> <p>Participant 4 indicates if there is a critical mass that the age/gender/sport issue diminishes because women won't let it happen. For example, in Rochester there is a strong female golf</p>

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	<p>to do well academically and athletically.</p> <p>I have an ED that is willing, and wants me to move forward in my career. However, when I go into a meeting with other people they ask me to be a note-taker, and she is not taken seriously.</p> <p>I know for a fact if a male my age walked into the room this wouldn't be the case. I don't have an issue with writing female, but I do have a problem writing my age.</p> <p>As soon as I walk into a room, the word director disappears and the word assistant appears.</p> <p>I don't think this is just NH.</p> <p>The other thing is that I play a lot of sports – particularly golf- where men look at her as a burden because she is a woman.</p> <p>Her observations are that men react differently to women depending on how they look.</p> <p>She has had to inject herself with confidence, and she</p>	<p>contingency that doesn't tolerate gender discrimination/prejudice.</p> <p>All of the women agreed that women can AND do participate in the bias as well.</p> <p>Participant 3 Indicates that she can say things that will have no influence until a man says something then everyone listens and reacts. EVERYONE nodded and agreed.</p>
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	<p>hopes as she gets older that she won't have to face this.</p> <p>Women ALSO have this bias.</p> <p>There is an inequality between gay men and gay women.</p> <p>She has seen her gay men friends be exposed to fearful situations – threatening situations.</p> <p>Once people realize that you are sexually unattainable then they stop trying to impress you or stop treating differently. They loosen up.</p>	
3	<p>I don't think of gender equality that much.</p> <p>It only comes up when someone else points it out.</p>	
4	<p>I grew up with women screaming at me in the bathroom as though I don't belong there.</p> <p>She has been called 'sir.'</p> <p>I have had the experience of walking into a room full of men when a woman walks in and the men turn into a babbling whatever, crazy person in order to impress</p>	

	<p>her.</p> <p>Since she has grown her hair and now that she has grown her hair, she has notice a change in men's behavior.</p> <p>Gender equality would also include being able to have comparable benefits to care for a parent versus a child.</p> <p>This would mean being able to have a flexible schedule and not have it count against you.</p> <p>For example, stop the clock for tenure without penalty. If you have a baby, you can stop the clock on tenure. Gender equality would allow people to stop the clock for any reason not just for babies.</p> <p>Participant 4. Notes that she has had colleagues that have noticed that as a woman she gets a heap of discrimination/prejudices from people.</p> <p>Participant 4 also notes that she is able to get more information from people in her position because of her gender. She hears this from women that women are expected to not only do the</p>	
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	<p>teaching but nurturing.</p> <p>She explained a script play at the conference with women playing, and men, and then rating the compassion score. Women outranked men in this regard. There are discussions about this but not really across the board.</p> <p>What is gender equity in this way? (Everyone relates)</p> <p>Over twenty years, when women get paid, they have coffee together, and it has advanced work. However people see it as a 'bunch of women clucking' together. This hour every two weeks can't be counted on a performance review.</p> <p>Gender expression influences how seriously people take her. There is a certain level of genderization that happens where women are seen in a certain light, and then talk about sports. There is a difference than if you walk into the room and you wouldn't be able to participate in that.</p> <p>In the workplace, lesbian</p>	
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	<p>women come off better than straight women. Straight women come off better than men.</p> <p>M. Thatcher says, “Man up, you are not man enough for the job.” There is less dissonance if you are not so extreme in the gender expression.</p>	
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2a. Reaction to the word ‘feminism’

Please note: this question was introduced by the facilitator and was not organically raised by the participants.

Participant	Comment	Note-taker observation
1	<p>At a previous job, she used this as the reason why she had this job.</p> <p>There were times when she didn’t feel included in the club. This is due to generational identity – particularly, that she didn’t relate to the ‘old school feminists.’</p> <p>It’s like your voice isn’t heard. This is a particular interest when it comes to having children because for those of us who don’t have children it is a whole other set of issues.</p>	<p>There is a sense that the term ‘feminism’ is outdated and something more positive – and contemporary - should replace it. The term ‘gender expression’ was used frequently with this group and could be considered.</p>

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	<p>She embraces the term and uses it proudly, but it can be expanded.</p> <p>Generationally, younger women who are embracing this term, they want to go into realms that the old school feminists don't want to go – sexuality...wanting to enjoy it, explore it, talk about it. We have a long way to go to bring that term to fulfill the promise of the word.</p> <p>Gender equality term may not be helpful.</p>	
2	<p>Feminist is a fading image and equality is the coming image.</p> <p>Freedom to be who you are no matter what gender you are; freedom over reproductive rights. It means being able to truly embrace who you are. Feminism is a bit segregated. In order not to shut down the conversation, this creates a certain image that can be detrimental to the overall thought of the word.</p> <p>Gender identity is an interesting discussion particularly when the discussion includes the</p>	

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	<p>introduction of transgender individuals. She used the example of her friend who is socially acceptable as a butch, but not as a transgender. She isn't accepted as a woman either.</p>	
<p>3</p>	<p>Gloria Steinham immediately comes to mind.</p> <p>She would prefer to expand this definition. It encompasses a lot more. The term is dated.</p> <p>Feminism means that you support women's rights. Feminist term isn't helpful.</p>	
<p>4</p>	<p>The dated piece is important.</p> <p>The word got co-opted for a long time.</p> <p>If you were not exactly right on point with what you were supposed to be doing that there was a sense that you were not enough.</p> <p>If we are talking about gender expression, men – traditionally, masculinity, that is far more complicated.</p> <p>As women, we can wear men's clothes to work.</p> <p>Deconstruct gender and sexual orientation if you</p>	<p>The participants agreed with the points outlined by Participant 4. Participants agree that this still happens among women.</p> <p>If you embrace your femininity – especially if you are a lesbian. (Group laughter in agreement)</p>

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	<p>loosen up those definitions the rest of it becomes pretty fluid. Most people identify with one category or the other and there are concrete things that manifest.</p> <p>We can intellectually deconstruct these issues, but we would be biting off more than we could chew.</p>	
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QUESTION #3: How have you, in NH, experienced gender equality or gender inequality?

Participant	Comment	Note-taker observation
1	<p>I lead with smart; I never lead with an appearance with my nieces. It is a deliberate choice. It's always about their matching outfits, or 'isn't she so cute.'</p>	
2	<p>Read a study that 83% of moms, they used the word beautiful to describe their daughters. This draws attention to their looks and femininity not onto their academics.</p> <p>The societal definition of beauty changes so you have to hang your hat on something more substantive.</p>	

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	<p>It's not wrong to help, but it shouldn't be one way.</p> <p>Meaning that the male ED should also be able to make coffee. It's more acceptable for the women to fill in the support role.</p>	
3	<p>It's important to say they are beautiful because they may look in the mirror and not think that about themselves.</p>	
4	<p>I have read many proposals in which I can tell the gender of the applicant by the tone of their words.</p> <p>Men tend to put in things that are very gendered – the guy in the lab is a good leader, he's organized, etc whereas she is empathetic, willing to support the work, etc.</p>	

QUESTION #4: The Post-It Exercise!

Participant	Comment	Note-Taker Observation
Top Three Issues from Participants	<p>Education (2)</p> <p>Civility</p> <p>Future Opportunities</p> <p>Compassion</p> <p>Black & white</p> <p>Understanding</p>	<p>Red Dots:</p> <p>Education</p> <p>Black & white (meaning the expression of gender shouldn't be so black and white)</p> <p>Note-taker comment: equal access to resources was noted twice despite not having a red dot</p>

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Participant	Comment	Note-Taker Observation
	<p>Gender Expression - Freedom</p> <p>Healthcare specific to women and women without kids</p> <p>Safety in the home</p> <p>Access to resources (\$)</p> <p>“Equal” Access to economic resources</p>	

Closing remarks from participants:

A discussion arose about gender expression in the LGBT community and the use of hormone drugs to achieve gender transformation.

Participant	Comment	Note-taker observation
1		
2		
3	<p>Would they [meaning the individuals who seek hormone treatments] even need the testosterone if we let them be who they are.</p>	Everyone agreed.
4	<p>Pod cast on This American Life on Testosterone. Four acts, and one was this topic.</p> <p>Ian Harvey –he is a comedian- if you take a lesbian on the “butch” end of the scale, and then starts taking the drug and tips into the male world (inner male self).</p> <p>In the testosterone piece, that he intellectually knows better,</p>	

	<p>that he knows that he is fighting with himself with this caveman impulse.</p> <p>Biologically we are different. There is a whole discussion to be had that is difficult that we need to do – particularly the use of hormone drugs in the LGBT community. This conversation will have some interesting insights to be had here.</p>	
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Limitations:

The methods designed by the GAP members to conduct the state-wide listening sessions were well thought and academically sound. While the GAP members worked hard to minimize the effects of bias on the thoughts and opinions of the participants, limitations to these methods still remain.

Limitations that are consistent with the limitations across the listening sessions include the use of participants who are directly connected to the facilitator, note-taker or within the NHWI network. This may serve to influence the results since the income and education demographics are similar across participants, which may mean that the participants are more similar in their thinking than if they were of more disparate demographics.

Limitations specific to this group may be related to the questions themselves since they may not be designed to accurately capture some of the more complex issues facing lesbians including issues related to safety.

Additionally, there were only four participants, but given the depth of the content it may have served to provide more ‘air time’ to each participant. There was a sense that the session was not long enough and that the session can only superficially capture the ideas of the participants. Another session should be conducted to broaden the understanding of the ideas and issues of concern for this community.

Facilitator and Note-taker observations and concluding thoughts:

As noted in the limitations section of this report, another session for this demographic should be conducted in order to provide the time and attention necessary to fully understand the ideas and concerns of the lesbian community.

This group began the session by discussing frustration with the idea women's issues shouldn't just include issues related to women with children. They expressed frustration that there are many women who can't, or choose not, to have children and that the issues they face are equally important and shouldn't be subjugated because of the enormity of presence that the expectation for most women is that they will be having children at some point in their life. However, a participant did qualify this discussion by saying that more and more lesbians are choosing to have children.

Additionally, at the conclusion of the session, the note-taker had a conversation with a participant regarding the meaningful inclusion of the gay community within the NHWI. The note-taker was interested to learn how the NHWI can meaningfully incorporate LGBT participation in NHWI efforts. The participant provided a couple of noteworthy ideas and is willing to discuss the topic further. The participant noted that not only having a diversity of sexualities on the NHWI board, but also that the straight women have genuine mindfulness regarding issues of 'gender expression' when we discuss gender equality is very important. The participant also noted that it would be meaningful to the LGTB group to have co-sponsored events with prominent LGTB groups as a means to show meaningful involvement with this community.

Appendix A: Listening Session Script

I. Welcome and Introductions

- Thank participants for coming
- Distribute participant information sheets (and agendas if using)
- Introduce facilitator and note taker
- Overview of New Hampshire Women's Initiative
 - The New Hampshire Women's Initiative is a new non-profit organization
 - A unification of:
 - The Commission on the Status of Women
 - The Women's Lobby and Alliance
 - The Women's Policy Institute
 - ***NHWI Mission: To advance social, economic and political opportunity and equality for women in New Hampshire.***
 - Has a Board of Directors and two advisory panels
 - Founding Mothers
 - Gender Ambassadors Panel
- Objective of Listening Sessions & GAP
 - Gender Ambassadors Panel will support the mission of the NHWI through researching and better understanding the gender equality issues that younger women and men identify as important to them.

- Members of GAP will host a series of Contemporary Gender Equality Listening Sessions in various geographic locations around the State.
- Introduction of participants: *First name, age, town, occupation*

II. Overview of the Process

- Description of plan for Listening Session by facilitator
- How discussion will be documented during the Session
- How a report will be prepared after the Session
- Assurance of confidentiality (inform participants that any report will only identify participants by age, zip code, and industry/occupation)

I. Establishment of Ground Rules

- Ground rules encourage active and honest participation and a safe discussion environment.
- If a participant violates a ground rule, they will be politely reminded of the ground rule.
- If a participant continues to violate a ground rule, they will be asked to leave the group.

Ground Rules (The 5 A's)

Participants of this group...

- Agree to maintain confidentiality
- Agree that there are no "right or wrong" answers to the questions
- Agree to speak honestly based on our own experiences
- Agree that only one person will speak at a time
- Agree to respond to one another politely and respectfully

II. Discussion of Contemporary Gender Equality

1) What made you interested in attending today's listening session on gender equality?

2) How do you define the term gender equality?

What does gender equality mean to you?

What does gender equality *not* mean to you?

What issues or subjects do you think about when you think of gender

equality?

3) In New Hampshire, have you experienced or observed gender equality or inequality?

III. Post-it Note Exercise

What issues relating to gender equality do you think are most important for the New Hampshire Women's Initiative to address?

(Each participant receives 3 standard yellow Post-it notes and a black sharpie; they must write their top three issues, one per Post-it note. Ask them to put the Post-its up on a white board or wall. Then each person gets one red dot. They must place their red dot on their top issue, which doesn't have to be one of the ones they originally wrote.)

** Facilitator must collect the Post-its and return to the GAP Committee when complete*

IV. Wrap-up

- Do you have any other thoughts or ideas that you really want to share about gender equality in NH?
- Thank you to participants by facilitator
- Collect participant information sheets; distribute NHWI information sheets

V. Adjourn

Works Cited

US Census. (2011). *US Same Sex Couples Household*. District of Columbia: US Census.