

Dees set out to write a book that helps to “provide permission.” Saying “it’s okay to ask that question if you and your loved one are agreeing to talk about that stuff.”

She set out to address the fact that, more often than not, well meaning but not sexuality savvy people are often apprehensive about starting a conversation for fear of sounding ignorant or bigoted. *QQST* and Dees ask, “Is there room for them to have that process of learning the way that we did very privately when coming out?”

She believes that the process of becoming educated about the LGBT community is very delicate. There is much room to be offensive or misunderstood. It was with that idea in mind that she only uses LesBiGay in her book. Out of respect for the trans community, she did not speak on trans-specific issues because she did not feel as if she had the authority. Her thought process around the book was to recognize an in between place between being ignorant and up-to-date. She claims that LesBiGay people enter into unknown territory when first coming out and must understand that their loved one is in this same new [but not necessarily scary] process. Dees aims to open the door and encourages readers to ask those questions that would not be good “at another time and place.”

QQST is a way to open the door for communication and not written exclusively to a straight reader. It’s for anyone who wants the tools and the permission to open a worry-free line of contact on a delicate subject.

The book provides some answers, but its purpose is to show that any answer, as long as it is from the heart, is okay. That’s why whenever the book provides an answer to a “queer question,” it acknowledges different experiences and tries to provide 2-3 sample answers, while trying to make sure the reader knows there *is* no correct answer.

One of the things that she really doesn’t want is for people to run off and say, “well MY gay friend said this...” because she worries that many LGBT individuals feel as if they have to adhere to stereotypes and absolutes about the community.

Dees touched on the fluidity in the now generation especially in regard to gender expression and the evolution of the queer community in the 25 years since she came out. She has witnessed changing ideas in feminism as well, such as more freedom to revel in, play with, and enjoy the idea of the male identity without feeling the need to combat all things

masculine.

The reactions of family members, especially those of Dees’ mother have also been evolving since she came out. When Dees was in the earlier stages of coming out, she considered her mother a homophobe. Now, her mother is editing the book, providing constructive criticism along the way.

She also had a concern that she feels is shared throughout the the LGBT community, that while family members speak of being supportive, they don’t always take on queer issues as their own, leaving their LGBT loved ones to fight alone. Dees says that she is lucky, now to have an incredibly affirming community around her and claims that “If you’re comfortable enough with who you are, people will love you no matter how you shake up their assumptions.”

Dees is not only an author, she is also a legal advisor with the Center for Health Justice doing working with HIV in correctional facilities, one of the issues close to her heart. She advocates for HIV care and accessibility to medications in prisons. She feels as if that issue is often neglected because America seems to forget about inmates after putting them away. Dees also works with housing discrimination, representing low-income tenants in LA and has worked with lots of GayLes issues as an attorney, law student, and activist. She was president of LA LesGay Lawyers Association, has connections and works with Lambda Legal and the ACLU, and is still active with the California bar. And, yes, she somehow had time to write a very informative book while doing all of this. She’s a prime example to college-aged advocates who are beginning to explore the ways in which they can change

LGBT policies and the general climate after graduation. She has used her knowledge of the law to help many different marginalized communities and is writing to help break down language boundaries around conversation about queer issues. She encourages people, gay or straight, to open up and to become educated about the lives, issues, and perspectives of others. Tell your story clearly and be heard. If you are on the receiving end of the story, listen and don’t be afraid to ask questions.

“Above all, I think you have to gently push rather than shove people into the conversation. If you start from a place of wanting to come closer to each other, and feeling respect, then you will stand a good chance of opening that conversation up well.” So UNC, why not open up conversation to better understand the ones we love? What do we have to lose?

Queer Questions Straight Talk



108 frank & provocative questions it's OK to ask your lesbian, gay or bisexual loved one

ABBY DEES