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I think I Might be Gay Pamphlet

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• Toll-free Hotlines

You may want to call a hotline to speak to someone about being gay. You may want to call from a phone booth for privacy. The people at the hotline will let you talk about your feelings, and will direct you to organizations that help gay people. There may even be a gay youth group in your area.

These hotline numbers are accurate as of August 1990 and are toll-free from anywhere in the United States. Hotlines sometimes change. If these don't work, try looking in a phone book. Most major cities have a lesbian and gay hotline.

National Lesbian and Gay Hotline:
1-800-SOS-GAYS

National AIDS Hotline: 1-800-342-AIDS

National Runaway Switchboard:
1-800-621-4000

• Local Gay Organizations

Check the white pages of your telephone book under "gay" or "lesbian". Especially look for hotlines, counseling agencies and youth groups.

This brochure was written by Kevin Cranston and Cooper Thompson, with help from members of BAGLY, Boston Alliance of Gay and Lesbian Youth, Inc.

Produced and distributed by The Campaign to End Homophobia. The Campaign is a network of people who work to end homophobia through information sharing and education which celebrates diversity, promotes love and support, and provides alternatives to oppression.

Rather than distributing pamphlets in bulk, we provide single, camera-ready copies so that users can customize, reproduce and distribute the pamphlets in whatever way is most effective for them. We ask for a contribution of \$25 from organizations and \$10 from individuals for camera-ready copy and permission to reprint the pamphlets for young lesbians and young gay men.

Write to us at The Campaign to End Homophobia, P.O. Box 819, Cambridge, MA 02139, for copies of both pamphlets and information about the Campaign and other resources we distribute.

I think I might be gay . . .

. . . now what do I do?

A Brochure for Young Men
Information for gay youth and young men
questioning their sexuality.



printed on recycled paper

• What does it mean to be gay?

Men who call themselves gay are sexually attracted to and fall in love with other men. Their sexual feelings toward men are normal and natural for them. These feelings emerge when they are boys and the feelings continue into adulthood. Although some gay men may also be attracted to women, they usually say that their feelings for men are stronger and more important to them.

We know that about one out of ten people in the world is gay or lesbian (lesbians are women who are attracted to other women). This means that in any large group of people, there are usually several gay people present. However, you cannot tell if someone is gay or not unless he or she wants you to know. Gay people blend right in with other people. But they often feel different from other people.

Gay teenagers may not be able to specify just why they feel different. All of the guys they know seem to be attracted to girls, so they don't know where they fit in. And, they may not feel comfortable talking with an adult about their feelings.

• How do I know if I'm gay?

"I don't remember exactly when I first knew that I was gay, but I do remember that the thought of sex with men always excited me"

Alan, age 19

"I never had any real attraction towards women, but I really knew that I was gay when puberty began. I felt an attraction toward the other boys and I was curious to find out what they were like"

James, 17

"One day I was flipping through a magazine, there was a cute guy, and bam! I knew."

Antonio, age 16

You may not know what to call your sexual feelings. You don't have to rush and decide how to label yourself right now. Our sexual identities develop over time. Most adolescent boys are intensely sexual during the years around puberty (usually between 11 and 15 years old), when their bodies start changing and their hormones are flowing in new ways. Your sexual feelings may be so strong that they are not directed toward particular persons or situations, but seem to emerge without cause. As you get older you will figure out who you are really attracted to.

Boys with truly gay feelings find that, over time, their attractions to boys and men get more and more clearly focused. You may find yourself falling in love with your classmates or maybe developing a crush on a particular adult man. You may find these experiences pleasurable, troubling, or a mix of the two. By age 16 or 17 many gay kids start thinking about what to call themselves, while others prefer to wait.

If you think you might be gay, ask yourself:

- When I dream or fantasize sexually, is it about boys or girls?
- Have I ever had a crush or been in love with a boy or a man?
- Do I feel different than other guys?
- Are my feelings for boys and men true and clear?

If you cannot answer these questions now, don't worry. You will be more sure in time. You and only you know how to label yourself correctly.

• Learning to like yourself

"I had to reject a lot of negative heterosexual and religious programming that made me feel lousy about myself as a gay person. I began to like myself by meeting other gay people and going to a gay support group. After that I was content with myself."

Bill, age 18

"My aunt is a lesbian, and she made it clear to me, before I even knew I was gay, that being gay was OK."

Antonio, age 16

"I accepted the facts, which means that I don't deny being gay and I don't pretend to be someone I'm not."

Alan, 19

It's not easy to discover that you are gay. Our society makes it very clear what it thinks of gay people. We all hear the terrible jokes, the hurtful stereotypes and the wrong ideas that circulate about gay people. People tend to hate or fear what they don't understand. Some people hate gay lesbians and gay men. Many people are uncomfortable being around lesbians and gay men.

It's no wonder that you might choose to hide your gay feelings from others. You might even be tempted to hide them from yourself.

You may wonder if you are normal. Perhaps you worry about people finding out about you. Maybe you avoid other kids who might be gay because of what people will think. Working this hard to conceal your thoughts and feelings is called being in the closet. It is a painful and lonely place to be, even if you stay there in order to survive.

It takes a lot of energy to deny your feelings, and it can be costly. You may have tried using alcohol or other drugs to numb yourself against these thoughts. You may have considered suicide. If so, please consult the phone

book for the Samaritans or another hotline. There are alternatives to denying your very valuable feelings. Check out the resources listed on the back of this brochure.

• Who should I tell?

"I only tell other people that I'm gay if I've known them for a long time and if they are accepting and tolerant. I think it's important that they know about this special part of me."

Bill, age 18

"Since I'm normal, I don't have to hide how I feel. But you should make sure that you are comfortable with your preference before you blurt it out to just anyone."

Nathan, age 19

"I tell people that I'm gay if I know that they won't reject me, will accept me for what I am, and won't try to 'straighten' me out. I test them, I suppose, then I judge if I want to risk telling them."

John, age 17

More and more gay kids are learning to feel better about themselves. As you start to listen to your deepest feelings and learn more about what it means to be gay you will begin to be comfortable with your sexuality. This is the process called coming out.

The first step in coming out is to tell yourself that you are gay and say, "That's OK." Later you may want to tell someone else — someone you trust to be understanding and sympathetic. You might choose a friend or an adult. You will probably want to meet other gay kids for friendship or a more intimate relationship. Some gay kids are able to come out to their families. You need to decide whether or not to tell your family, and to choose the right time. Lots of people, including parents, simply don't understand gay people and are difficult to come out to. In the beginning, be cautious about whom to tell.

But it is crucial to be honest with yourself. Just as self-denial costs you, coming out pays off. Most kids who accept their sexuality say they feel calmer, happier and more confident.

"No matter what people say, you are normal. God created you, and you were made in His image. If you are non-religious, you were born and you have a purpose, and being gay is only part of it."

Nathan, age 19

"Stand up for what you believe in, and don't listen to what hatemongers have to say; it's only so much hot air. Stay proud and confident!"

John, age 17

• Will I ever have sex?

Naturally, you think about finding an outlet for your sexual feelings. Becoming a healthy sexual person is part of the coming out process. You may be scared at the prospect of having sex. This is normal for everyone. No one should start having sex until they are ready. Until then, you may choose to masturbate or fantasize.

Sex should only happen between mature individuals who care about each other. You will know when the time is right.

We all choose to have sex in different ways, whether we are gay or straight. Gay men choose from a wide range of sexual practices including masturbation (either alone or with another person), oral sex, anal intercourse, kissing, hugging, massage, wrestling, holding hands, cuddling or anything else that appeals to both partners. You are in complete control over what you do sexually and with whom.

• What about AIDS?

All sexually active people need to be aware of AIDS as well as other sexually transmitted diseases. Being gay does not give you AIDS, but certain sexual practices and certain drug use behaviors can put you at risk for catching the virus that causes AIDS. AIDS is incurable, but is preventable.

Here's how to reduce your risk of getting AIDS:

- Do not shoot up drugs. Sharing needles is the most dangerous behavior in terms of getting AIDS.
- Avoid anal intercourse or other direct anal contact. Anal intercourse transmits the virus very efficiently. If you do engage in anal sex, use a condom every time.
- Use condoms whenever you engage in anal or oral sex (or vaginal sex if you have sex with women). You should choose latex condoms that are fresh and undamaged. Store them away from heat (your wallet is not a good place to keep them). Use a condom only once. Try to choose condoms with "reservoir tips", and be sure to squeeze out the air from the tip as you put it on. Hold on to the condom as you remove your penis; sometimes they slip off after sex.
- or choose sexual activities that do not involve intercourse: hugging, kissing, talking, massaging, wrestling or masturbating (on unbroken skin).

• Books

The following books can give you additional information about being gay. Some of these books may be in your public library. If you feel comfortable, ask the librarian in the "young

adult" section of the library. Librarians are usually glad to help. If the librarian can't help you, try the "Gay" section of a large bookstore. If that doesn't help, you might want to order books and other materials through the mail. If you're not having any luck at all, try calling one of the hotlines listed below or looking for a local gay organization.

One Teenager in Ten: Writings by Gay and Lesbian Youth, ed. Ann Heron, Alyson Publications, 40 Plympton Street, Boston, MA 02118 (1983).

Beyond Acceptance: Parents of Lesbian and Gay Children Talk About Their Experiences, Griffin, Wirth and Wirth, Prentice-Hall, 1986.

Looking at Gay and Lesbian Life, Warren Blumenfeld and Diane Raymond, Beacon Press (1988).

How To Be a Happy Homosexual, Terry Sanderson, Alyson Publications (1990). This book is published in England but is distributed by Alyson.

Tales of the Closet, (comic books about being gay), Ivan Velez, Hetrick-Martin Institute for the Protection of Lesbian and Gay Youth, 401 West Street, New York, NY 10014.

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• Local Gay Organizations

Check under the white pages of your telephone book under "gay" or "lesbian." Especially look for hotlines, counselling agencies and youth groups. Family planning agencies and women's health centers may also be good places to look for support.

This brochure was written by Tammy, Tammi, Terryle, Camelia, Michelle, Natalie, Rebecca and Sarah, members of OUTRIGHT, the Portland, Maine Alliance of Lesbian and Gay Youth, with help from Diane, their advisor.

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I think I might
be a lesbian . . .

. . . now what do
I do?

A Brochure for Young Women

Information written by lesbian youth for
lesbian youth and young women
questioning their sexuality.



printed on recycled paper

• What does it mean to be a lesbian?

Lesbians are women-loving-women. We are women who are sexually attracted to other women. We are women who may feel emotionally and spiritually closer to women. We are women who prefer women as our partners.

As lesbians we are not alone. One out of ten teenagers is lesbian or gay. Many famous women in history were lesbians. Lesbians are teachers, doctors, lawyers, factory workers, police officers, politicians, ministers, movie stars, artists, mothers, nuns, truck drivers, models, novelists. You name it, we do it.

Lesbians are white, Black, Asian, Hispanic, Native American, Jewish, Catholic, Protestant, Buddhist. Lesbians are rich, poor, working class, and middle class. Some lesbians are in heterosexual marriages. Some lesbians are disabled. Lesbians are young women and old women. You name it, we are it.

Lesbians live in the cities and in the country. We are everywhere.

• How do I know if I'm a lesbian?

"When I was young I always wanted to grow up and live with my best girlfriend, and that feeling never changed as I got older."

Tammy, age 17

"When we're really young, we have crushes on girls, but then we're supposed to grow out of it. We're supposed to read books about how a girl meets boy and boy meets girl. Well, I'd never finish those books."

Terryie, age 16

During adolescence, most young women begin to be aware of sexual feelings and take an interest in dating. Many young women feel physically attracted to men. But many other young women feel physically attracted to other women.

You may notice that you feel turned on by other women. You may feel different from your girlfriends, like you don't fit in sometimes. When your girlfriends are checking out boys, you may find yourself checking out girls. Going out with boys may not interest you. You may find yourself wondering, "Why aren't there any men like these terrific women I keep meeting?"

You may also feel confused or unsure about whether or not you're a lesbian. Many adults will tell us that we're too young to call ourselves gay, or that we're going through a phase, or that we don't know what we're talking about. That's their way of avoiding the fact that some of us are lesbian youth.

You may feel confused because you're attracted to both men and women. That's OK. Some women have relationships with both men and women throughout their lives. Some may later decide to be exclusively lesbian or heterosexual.

Our sexuality develops over time. Don't worry if you aren't sure.

• Am I normal?

"We're told that it's sick, or perverted, or sinful, or abnormal. But the people who tell us that are the same ones who say that women belong in the kitchen, and that Black people are inferior, and that handicapped people are useless. Who's to say what's normal? Some people think eating raw fish is normal, and other people think it's disgusting and abnormal."

Terryie, age 16

"I think we're very brave to have recognized this in ourselves and to have wanted to come to terms with it."

Natalie, age 18

Yes, you are normal. It's perfectly natural for people to be attracted to members of their own sex. But it's not something that's encouraged in our society. Many people push away these feelings because of prejudice against gay men and lesbians.

Most scientific experts agree that a person's sexual orientation is determined at a very young age, maybe even at birth.

It's normal and healthy to be yourself, whether you're gay or straight. What's really important is that we learn to like ourselves.

• What is it like to be young and lesbian?

"I feel very powerful, special, independent, strong, and courageous."

Natalie, age 18

"It's scary sometimes. I've felt very unsure of myself. But other times I feel wonderful and proud."

Terryie, age 16

There's no "right" way or "wrong" way to be a lesbian. Because of society's stereotypes about lesbians that we've all grown up with, you might think you have to be a certain way if you're a lesbian. But lesbians come in all shapes and sizes, from all occupations, and with all levels of education.

Your sexual orientation is only one part of who you are. You probably have hobbies and interests that are the same as your straight friends.

fingers into your partner's vagina or ass, especially if you have tiny cuts or rashes on your hands.

- And all the other wonderful things that lesbians do together.

• How do we learn to like ourselves?

"It's important that we don't deny our feelings. If we be who we truly want to be in our hearts, we can be surprised at how happy we can be. And we should think a lot about all our positive points, and being a lesbian is very positive."

Rebecca, age 16

"It helps me to interact with people who make me feel happy and good about myself. And I try to do things I feel good about doing."

Sarah, age 19

All people have a right to feel good about themselves. We're all valuable human beings. Developing self-esteem is very important for young people. It's hard for gay and lesbian youth to feel good about ourselves because all around us are people who believe that we're sick, or perverted, or destined to live very unhappy lives.

When we feel like we have to hide who we really are, it can make us feel like hurting ourselves, like through alcohol, drugs, or suicide. We may feel very isolated, fearful, and depressed, especially if we've had no one to talk to about the fact that we're lesbians.

More and more, we, as young lesbians, are learning to like who we are. It helps to read good books about lesbians — books that have accurate information in them and that are written about lesbians who are leading very fulfilling lives. It also helps to meet other lesbians because then we find out that lesbians are as diverse as any other group of people and that we've been told a lot of lies by our society.

It can help to say to yourself every day, "I'm a lesbian and I'm OK." And try to find someone to talk to who also believes that lesbians are OK. Remember: it's normal and natural to be a lesbian, just like it's normal and natural for some people to be heterosexual.

• How can I meet other lesbians?

"There are many lesbians around you, but you don't know they're lesbians, just as they don't know that you're a lesbian. Don't lose hope. You'll eventually meet some."

Sarah, age 19

- Make contact with local feminist organizations like the National Organization for Women (NOW).
- Many colleges and universities have campus gay, lesbian, and feminist organizations.
- Check your phone book for a local hotline and ask for the gay and lesbian organizations in your area. There might even be a gay/lesbian youth group in your area.
- Look for a gay/lesbian or feminist newspaper in your area. Check local bookstores, health food stores, and gay bars for copies.
- Contact the resources listed on the back of this brochure.

• Books

The following books can give you additional information about being a lesbian. Some of these books may be in your public library. If you feel comfortable, ask the librarian in the "young adult" section of the library. Librarians are usually glad to help. If the librarian can't help you, try the "Lesbian," "Gay," or "Women" section of

a large bookstore. If that doesn't help, you might want to order books and other materials through the mail. If you're not having any luck at all, try calling one of the hotlines listed below or looking for a local gay or lesbian organization.

One Teenager in Ten: Writings by Gay and Lesbian Youth, ed. Ann Heron, Alyson Publications, 40 Plympton St. Boston, MA 02118 (1983)

The New Our Bodies, Ourselves, Boston's Women's Health Book Collective, Simon & Schuster, Inc. (1984). Contains a great chapter on lesbian life and relationships.

Lesbian Connection, a monthly newsletter available from Helen Diner Memorial Women's Center, Ambitious Amazons, P.O. Box 811, East Lansing, Michigan 48826

Our Right to Love: A Lesbian Resource Book, ed. Ginny Vida, Prentice-Hall, Inc. (1978)

This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color, eds. Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua, Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, P.O. Box 908, Latham, New York 12110-0908 (1981).

Lesbian Sex, by JoAnn Loulan, Spinsters/Aunt Lute, P.O. Box 410687, San Francisco, CA 94141 (1984)

Nice Jewish Girls: A Lesbian Anthology, ed. Evelyn Torton Beck, The Crossing Press (1982).

Looking at Gay and Lesbian Life, Warren Blumenfeld and Diane Raymond, Beacon Press (1988).

Being Lesbian, Lorraine Trenchard, Alyson Publications (1990). This book is published in England but is distributed by Alyson.

Tales of the Closet, (comic books about being a lesbian), Ivan Velez, Hetrick-Martin Institute for the Protection of Lesbian and Gay Youth, 401 West Street, New York, NY 10014.

Because of homophobia and prejudice, some people don't accept lesbians and gay men. Lesbians and gay men suffer from discrimination and violence. That's why there are many gay and lesbian organizations that work for gay and lesbian civil rights.

"Once I accepted myself and my sexuality, I found that I became more involved in life with my friends because I was more comfortable with myself."

Tammi, age 18

"I feel down and depressed a lot because of the homophobia that I'm constantly up against, but then I realize that I have the power to educate other members of my generation."

Tammy, age 17

• Who should I tell?

"You shouldn't feel pressured to tell anyone at all until you are comfortable with the idea of being a lesbian yourself. Be prepared that people's reactions will vary."

Tammi, age 18

"Only tell someone if you feel you have enough support to face what may happen. Try to tell someone if you think you can't deal with these feelings alone anymore. If you think your family might flip out, tell someone who might be more impartial."

Sarah, age 19

"When I told a couple of my friends, I told them I was no different now than I was five minutes before I told them, except that now I wasn't keeping a big secret from them."

Terryle, age 16

Coming out is the process of accepting yourself as a lesbian and figuring out how open you want to be about your sexual orientation.

Unfortunately, not everyone you know will think that being a lesbian is the greatest thing

since sliced bread. It's hard to know who can handle the information and give you support. Some friends may accept you. Some may turn away from you or tell other people without your permission. Telling family can be very difficult. Some families are very supportive. But some lesbian and gay youth have been kicked out of their homes when their parents found out.

Maybe there's a guidance counselor or social worker in your school or in a local youth or counseling agency that you can trust. It's important to have someone to talk to because it's not normal or healthy for young people to have to keep secret such an important part of their lives.

• What about sex?

"First I would ask myself if I felt ready. Then I would talk to my partner to see if she felt ready. When you decide to have sex, it feels good when you've made the right decision. Only you can know when it is and isn't right for you to have sex."

Tammi, age 18

"Just because you're turned on to someone doesn't mean you're ready to have sex. You have to feel emotionally ready. It's important that the two people talk about what they like and don't like. No one should have to do something they don't want to do. There's no need to rush things. It'll come in time."

Terryle, age 16

Deciding whether or not to be sexual with someone is a big decision. You may feel very scared at the thought of having sex with another woman. That's OK. Lots of us do, especially if it's our first time.

Women aren't encouraged in our society to talk openly about sex, but it's important that we communicate about what we like and don't like to do sexually, whether we feel ready to have sex or not, and different expectations we may have

about the relationship. And it's important to talk about whether we're at risk for HIV, the virus that is thought to cause AIDS, or other sexually transmitted diseases, like herpes.

There are many ways that lesbians can be sexual with each other. We can give each other pleasure by holding, kissing, hugging, stroking, stimulating each other's genitals with our tongues and hands, inserting our fingers into each other's vaginas, rubbing our bodies together to stimulate each other, and anything else we want to do. We can use our imaginations!

• Do I have to worry about AIDS?

All of us should know about HIV, the virus believed to be the cause of AIDS — how it's transmitted and how we can prevent ourselves from becoming infected. You and your partner should discuss your risk factors for HIV infection and decide what, if any, safer sex methods you should use.

Lesbians who are at risk are those who:

- Share needles if using IV drugs.
- Have vaginal intercourse with men without using condoms. (It's fairly common for young lesbians to occasionally have sexual contact with men.)
- Have oral sex with an infected woman without the use of a barrier to protect against infected vaginal secretions or menstrual blood.

Safer sex for lesbians includes:

- Use of a dental dam for oral-vaginal and oral-anal stimulation. A dental dam is a piece of latex about 5 inches square designed for use in dental surgery. They are available at dental or medical supply stores.
- Use of surgical gloves when sticking your