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-harassment); institutional
-g, immigration, child cus-
-); and cultural norms (no
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Further Resources

DiversityWorks
201 North Valley Rd
Pelham, MA 01002
(413) 256-1868

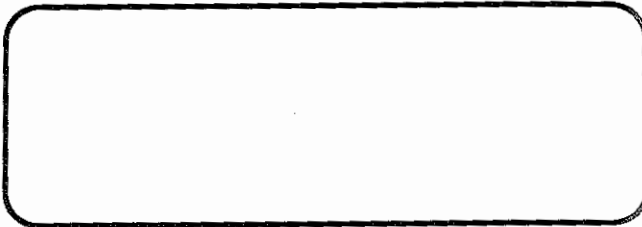
**Federation P-FLAG (Parents and Friends of
Lesbians and Gays)**
PO Box 27605
Washington, DC 20038
(202) 638-4200

Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund
666 Broadway #410
New York, NY 10012
(212) 995-8585

National Gay and Lesbian Task Force
1517 U St. NW
Washington, DC 20009
(202) 332-6483

National Hotline to Report Hate Crimes
(800) 347-HATE

Local Contact



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We conduct trainings to increase the sensitivity of participants to various forms of social oppression. Our programs enable people to take steps against heterosexism, racism, sexism, classism, Jewish oppression, and disability oppression. We conduct skill development and action planning programs which help participants to function as change agents and to create multicultural organizations.

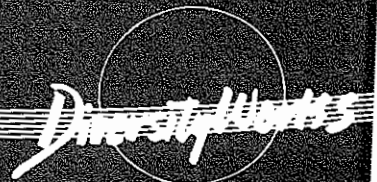


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STRAIGHT TALK ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY



Introduction

"Homosexuality" is a clinical term. Most male homosexuals generally prefer to be called "gay men" and most homosexual women generally prefer to be called "lesbians." Much of the prejudice against lesbians and gay men is based on stereotypes and lack of information. Due to our socialization and fear of the unknown, people who are different from the majority can be perceived as threatening. The purpose of this brochure is to present factual answers to questions most often asked about homosexuality and to identify resources for those seeking additional information.

What Is Homosexuality?

Homosexuality is the capacity to feel love and sexual satisfaction with someone of the same gender. Heterosexuality is the capacity to feel love and sexual satisfaction with someone of the other gender and bisexuality is the capacity to feel such a connection with someone of either gender.

What Causes Homosexuality?

Perhaps a better question is "What determines sexual orientation (ie. heterosexuality, bisexuality, homosexuality)?" The factors that determine sexual orientation are complex. To date, no research has established the causes of either heterosexuality or homosexuality. There is growing understanding that human beings have basic sexuality which can be expressed in a variety of relationships — homosexual, bisexual, and heterosexual. Although the causes are not known, many researchers believe that one's basic sexual orientation is predisposed at birth or established by a very early age. While these primary affectional inclinations may not be recognized or acknowledged for many years, once established, they tend not to change substantially.

How Many Gay Men and Lesbians Are There?

The Kinsey Institute research, conducted in the 1940's and 1950's, suggests that approximately 10% of the population is lesbian or gay. Though some researchers believe this estimate to be too high or too low, it is safe to assume that lesbians and gay men constitute a significant minority group. Consequently, even though we may not be aware of their sexual orientation, most of us know someone who is lesbian or gay. The vast majority of lesbians and gay men remain "in the closet"; that is, they reveal their sexual orientation to only a few trusted friends.

When Do Gay Men and Lesbians First Know?

There is no set age at which a person becomes aware that she or he is lesbian or gay. Some gay, lesbian, and bisexual people become aware of their sexual orientation during adolescence. Because of the strong societal pressures to be heterosexual, however, some people do not realize that a heterosexual lifestyle does not meet their needs until later in life, perhaps even after they have been married for years.

Can You Tell If People Are Lesbian or Gay By Their Appearance?

No. Lesbians and gay men are as varied in their dress, mannerisms, and styles as are heterosexuals. Despite this diversity, many stereotypes persist about the effeminate man or the masculine woman. Although some gay people do adopt these styles, the overwhelming majority of lesbians and gay men do not conform to these stereotypes, and their sexual orientation is invisible to the general public. We only "see" those who conform to our stereotypes.

People who dress in the clothing of the opposite sex are called transvestites. The vast majority of transvestites are heterosexual, not lesbians or gay men.

Do Lesbians and Gay Men Hate The Opposite Sex?

No. Lesbians are lesbians because they form loving relationships with women, and gay men are gay men because they form loving relationships with men, and neither form these relationships because they hate the other gender. Many lesbians have close male friends and many gay men have close women friends.

Do Lesbians and Gay Men Want To Be The Opposite Sex?

No. Lesbians and gay men do not want to be the opposite sex. Within the gay community, there are many who have challenged and discarded stereotypical sex roles but this does not mean that they are trying to be the other gender. Gayness involves celebration and affirmation of one's gender, not a rejection of it.

Some people confuse gayness with transsexuality. A transsexual is a person who has an operation to become the other gender. These people — very few of whom are lesbian or gay — feel deeply that they have been born into the wrong body and should be the other gender.

Is Homosexuality Healthy?

Studies have shown that people's sexual orientation has no bearing on their mental and emotional stability. In one landmark research project, mental health professionals were unable to distinguish between homosexuals and heterosexuals in terms of functionality, stability, and creativity. In 1973, the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from the official listing of psychiatric disorders. In 1975, the American Psychological Association adopted a similar resolution.

Is Homosexuality Immoral?

Many religious traditions have taught and some continue to teach that homosexuality is immoral. These condemnations are based primarily on a few isolated passages from the Bible. Historically, Biblical passages taken out of context have been used to justify such things as slavery, the inferior status of women, and the persecution of religious minorities. In recent years, many theologians and clergy have begun to look at sexual relationships in terms of the love, mutual support, commitment, and the responsibility of the partners rather than the gender of the individuals involved. Currently, there are many gay and lesbian religious groups and religious congregations that are open, accepting, and supportive of the gay community.

Is Being Gay "Natural"?

Each culture defines what is "natural" or "normal" to fit its own context and these definitions differ. Historians tell us that homosexuality has existed since the earliest of human societies. Anthropologists report that lesbians and gay men have been part of every culture, that in many cultures bisexuality is the norm, and that in some societies homosexuality is very common. Lesbians and gay men are represented in every socioeconomic class, educational level, and race. It is often said that homosexual behavior is not natural because the purpose of sex should be reproduction. In addition to the fact that most heterosexual encounters are not intended to produce children, homosexual relationships, like heterosexual relationships, consist of much more than just sexual encounters. A homosexual identity involves both an emotional commitment to people of the same gender and membership in a community.

Do Gay Men and Lesbians Have Long-Lasting Relationships?

Yes, long-standing relationships are common. The difficulty, when compared to heterosexual relationships, however, is that society and the family (for the most part) disapprove of homosexuality. This disapproval puts an extra strain on gay and lesbian relationships which also have to cope with the common stresses that affect all couples.

Should Gay Men and Lesbians Be Barred From Certain Jobs?

Sexual orientation does not affect one's job qualifications. Unfortunately, some people believe that gay men and lesbians should not be allowed to hold certain positions such as teacher, foster parent, soldier, counselor, religious leader, or police officer. They fear that gay men and lesbians are sexually irresponsible and less trustworthy than heterosexuals. (In fact it is well documented that the overwhelming majority of those who molest children are heterosexual men.) These beliefs, like those used to discriminate against people on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, physical ability or gender, are based on prejudice and ignorance rather than on accurate information.

Why are Lesbians and Gay Men So Blatant?

Gay men and lesbians are often accused of being blatant (wearing buttons, marching in gay rights marches, talking and writing about homosexuality, holding hands in public, etc.). Our culture teaches that the only semi-acceptable way to be gay or lesbian is to be silent or invisible ("in the closet"). Any openness about lesbian or gay identity is labeled "blatant" or derided as "flaunting it." "Blatant" heterosexuality is rarely questioned (ads, TV, song lyrics, institutional practices such as benefits for spouses and hospital visitation rights). Heterosexuals are rarely criticized for talking about their love lives, wearing buttons that proclaim, "I'm his/hers," or being affectionate in public.

In our society, the assumption of heterosexuality is so strong that unless one proclaims one's lesbianism, gayness, or bisexuality, one is automatically assumed to be heterosexual. In order not to be misperceived, "coming out" in some fashion is often a necessity.