

Some Common Assumptions about Sexual Orientation: Recognising, Challenging and Changing Them.

1. Don't assume that everyone is either 'homosexual' or 'heterosexual'. Instead, know that there is a continuum of attraction and affiliation.
2. Don't assume that sexuality is the most important feature of a gay/lesbian/bisexual person's identity. Instead, understand that sexuality is one facet of their relationship.
3. Don't assume that all DSG people use the same language to describe themselves. Instead, recognise that the words and language commonly used (lesbian, gay, queer, dyke, transgender, homosexual) mean different things to different people and often make important political statements.
4. Don't assume that all people are at the same developmental stage of the 'coming out' process. Instead, develop your familiarity with the issues surrounding 'coming out' and know that some DSG people may not be comfortable with their gender identity or sexual orientation, or may not be 'out'.
5. Don't assume that families always consist of a heterosexual, cis gendered couple with children. Instead, acknowledge that there are many types of family structures and that many DSG people have children and/or want children.
6. Don't assume that a DSG person wants to talk with you about their sexual orientation or gender identity. Instead, think about all the issues which may affect someone's decision to reveal this sort of information, including context, comfort level, familiarity, safety, need for privacy, etc.
7. Don't assume that DSG people are experts on the subject. Instead, consider the possibility that sexual orientation/gender identity is only one of the many important things in their lives.
8. Don't assume that DSG people assume that you are straight. Instead, challenge the ways in which heterosexuality is considered the normative or 'default' sexual orientation in society and don't feel compelled to declare your straightness to others.
9. Don't assume that GLB people are attracted to you. Instead, realize that they may or may not be attracted to you and use the opportunity to assess your own comfort levels towards sexuality.
10. Don't assume that being DSG is the cause of a person's problems or that it has contributed to their problems. Instead, understand that DSG people face the same challenges in life as everyone else **and** they confront discrimination and oppression in their everyday lives.
11. Don't assume that DSG people want 'special rights' or 'special consideration'. Instead, advocate for a society which promotes justice for people irrespective of sexual orientation and gender identity.
12. Don't assume that DSG people believe the same things, want the same things or need the same things. Instead, appreciate the diversity within the Rainbow community and find ways of supporting/acknowledging these differences.

13. Don't assume that DSG people have any more or less knowledge about STD/HIV/AIDS and/or birth control than a heterosexual person. Instead, realize that these issues have special significance in the gay community.

14. Don't assume that DSG people know that you're an ALLY or will trust you automatically even if they do know. Instead, finds ways to communicate that you are an ALLY by focusing on the verbal and nonverbal messages you are communicating about your level of acceptance and affirmation.

Commonplace Ignorance and Sensible Answers

Regarding Gay and Lesbian People

What causes homosexuality? Is it a choice?

Sexual Orientation, whether it be heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual is not something that one chooses. Studies suggest orientation has a genetic or biological component, and it is probably determined before or shortly after birth. Like heterosexuals, gays and lesbians discover their sexuality as a process of maturing, they are not recruited, seduced or taught to be homosexual (Bell, Weinburg, M.S. & Hammersmith, 1981), (Troiden, 1989). The only choice most gay or lesbian people have is whether or not to live their lives honestly, or according to society's unrealistic expectations.

Is homosexuality a psychological problem or mental illness?

The American Psychological Association and the American Psychiatric Association do not consider homosexuality to be an emotional or mental disorder. Published research is overwhelming – there is no significant difference between the mental health of heterosexuals and the mental health of same-sex attracted people. However, the social stigma associated with being gay or lesbian can be emotionally trying.

Is Homosexuality 'caused' by certain types of parenting?

Gay and lesbian people grow up in all types of homes, with all types of families. They are raised in rural areas, large cities and everywhere in between. Gay men and lesbians represent every socioeconomic, ethnic, and religious background possible. "There is evidence that parents have very little influence on the outcome of their children's sexual orientation under normal upbringing conditions." (Reinisch, 1988). However, a parents' attitude can influence the way a child chooses to relate to his or her sexuality, whether it be heterosexual or homosexual.

Is homosexuality caused by abuse or a bad experience with someone of the opposite sex?

Many people suffer from all types of abuse and neglect as children, yet grow up to be heterosexual. Many people, both heterosexual and same-sex attracted, have had bad experiences with a person of the opposite sex. There is no correlation between any of these occurrences and homosexuality.

Can Homosexuality be cured?

Since homosexuality is not a disease or disorder, there is nothing to cure. A few therapists claim they can rid gay and lesbian people of their homosexual desires, but their methods remain questionable and rarely, if ever have resulted in permanently changing anybody's sexual orientation (Haldeman, 1994). According to the American Psychological Association, no scientific evidence exists to support the effectiveness of any therapies that attempt to convert homosexuals to heterosexuals. The American Psychological Association Executive Director Dr. Raymond Fowler also states that "Groups who try to change the sexual orientation

of people through so called conversion therapy are misguided and run the risk of causing a great deal of psychological harm to those they say they are trying to help.” Some religious ‘ex-gay’ ministries claim to be able to ‘cure’ homosexuality through prayer and ‘reparative therapy’.

All well respected research suggests that these reports are misrepresented and highly flawed. It is likely that so-called successes are cases of bi-sexual people attempting to repress their same-sex attractions and only act on opposite-sex attractions.

What is the gay lifestyle?

Just as there is no such thing as a single heterosexual lifestyle, there is no such thing as a gay or lesbian lifestyle. Anti-gay activists have promoted the idea that the lives of homosexuals revolve around sex and the pursuit of sexual encounters, and that the only identity homosexuals have is being gay or lesbian. To anti-gay organisations this is the only gay lifestyle that exists, and they do their best to promote this misconception. In reality, the lives of gays and lesbians are as varied as the lives of heterosexuals (Garnets and Kimmel, 1993). Some choose to live in long term committed relationships, other choose to remain single. Some couples choose to raise children, others do not. Hobbies, occupations and activities are just as varied as within the heterosexual population.

How many gay and lesbian people are there?

For decades the incidence of homosexuality in the general population has estimated to be approximately ten percent. Organisations opposed to gay rights have consistently claimed the number to be much lower. Despite the controversy, ten percent still remains the most widely accepted estimate.

Aren't gay people obsessed with sex?

Contrary to popular belief, gay men and lesbians are no more inclined to be consumed with sexual thoughts or feelings than their heterosexual counterparts (Bell, Weinburg, 1978), nor are they attracted to everyone of the same sex they meet. The lives of same-sex attracted people – like the lives of heterosexuals – are about much more than sex, but it's easy to see why people believe these common misconceptions. Many people do not even realise that they know someone who is lesbian, gay or bisexual. Consequently, their only knowledge of same-sex attractions come from the media or out-spoken anti-gay organisations, neither of which is likely to show the average LGB person or couple. The media is in the business of selling news, and radical behaviour of any kind sells. Anti-gay organisations are in the business of making LGB people appear as hedonistic as possible. They will obviously focus their attention on the most radical behaviour that can be found within the LGB community.

Aren't homosexuals promiscuous?

Promiscuity has nothing to do with one's sexual orientation, but rather one's values and beliefs. Just as in the heterosexual community, some gay people are promiscuous, some are not. In a 1992 study, 55.5% of gay men and 71.2% of lesbians reported to be in steady relationships (Overlooked Opinions, 1993).

Are homosexuals miserable, lonely people?

Members of anti-gay organisations like to offer proof that being gay is bad by stating that most gay and lesbian people are miserable and lonely. First of all, the majority of homosexuals are not terribly unhappy or lonely, but these organisations may have a point. Being gay in our society is not easy. The social stigma, rejection by family, friends and church, the discrimination and sense of social isolation can all be emotionally devastating.

What these anti-gay organisations fail to admit is that they are a larger part of the problem. By spreading malicious lies which demonise gays and lesbians, they spread their sexual prejudice throughout society, making the world a sometimes intolerant place for homosexuals.

Are lesbians radical feminist man-haters?

While the overwhelming majority of lesbians are feminists, most feminists do not hate men. They simply support the belief that women deserve the same rights to make personal decisions and the same opportunities for social and professional growth that men currently enjoy.

Why do gay people flaunt their sexuality?

The majority of gay people don't flaunt their sexuality. As a matter of fact, many go to great lengths to hide their sexual orientation. There is a double standard in our society. What some consider to be flaunting by homosexuals is usually regarded as everyday behaviour for heterosexuals. A heterosexual couple walking hand in hand is perceived as normal. Very few would consider their behaviour to be inappropriate, if they even notice it at all. On the other hand, a lesbian or gay couple exhibiting the same behaviour would almost certainly be noticed, and most likely accused of flaunting their sexuality or promoting their lifestyle, they may be harassed or even worse yet, physically attacked. Heterosexuals are free to talk about their spouses or dates. They can wear their wedding rings, display pictures of their loved ones on their desks, kiss good-bye at the airport, include their significant other in company parties and so on. A gay person who chooses not to be seen as a trouble maker or a radical homosexual out to prove a point, may decide not to do these things. The truth is most gay people are not out to make a statement. They simply want to be able to incorporate the many aspects of their lives the way heterosexuals are permitted to do.

What gay people do in bed is disgusting and perverted

First of all, what two consenting adults do in the privacy of their own bedroom is nobody's business but their own. Secondly, gay and lesbian people don't do anything in bed that heterosexuals don't do themselves. Intimate behaviour between gay and lesbian couples could be conceived as mild when compared to what some heterosexual couples do.

Are homosexuals more likely to molest children?

One of the most enduring and damaging myths equates homosexuality with child molestation. In truth, the most likely person to sexually abuse a child is a heterosexual male (96%); in many cases that person is a family member or a close family friend (Falk, 1989), (Koss, 1994). Paedophiles that molest children of the same sex are almost never homosexual in their adult sexual relations (Groth & Birnbaum, 1978). Furthermore, the molestation of children by heterosexual women appears to be uncommon, and even less so among lesbians (Erikson, Walbeck & Seely, 1988) (Finkelhor, 1984) (Johnson & Shrier, 1987).

Don't homosexuals recruit and seduce naïve adults?

In an effort to spread fear and ignorance, organisations that oppose gay rights often portray homosexuals as sexual predators out to recruit or seduce as many people as possible. Homosexuals, like heterosexuals, discover their sexuality as a process of maturing; they are not

recruited, seduced or brainwashed into the gay lifestyle (Bell, Weinburg & Hammersmith, 1981), (Trioden, 1989). Common sense proves the difficulty gay people would face in trying to recruit. What would they have to offer? Rejection by family and friends, fear of discrimination, the opportunity to experience harassment, violence and possible death at the hands of a homophobe? The idea of recruitment is utterly without scientific foundation (Weinburg, 1977).

Isn't homosexuality abnormal or unnatural; after all, they can't have children?

Homosexuality is not the sexual orientation of the majority of people, but that in itself does not make it abnormal. If we were to use that type of logic; we would have to consider left-handed people as abnormal too. To a heterosexual person, an intimate relationship with someone of the same sex might seem abnormal or unnatural, but not any more so than heterosexual relations would seem to someone who is gay. Furthermore, there is nothing abnormal or unnatural about wanting to share your life and love with another person. Having the ability to produce offspring is not a prerequisite. If it were, we would deny marriage licenses to heterosexual couples who do not wish to, or for some reasons are unable to have children. Also, homosexuality is found in most species in the animal kingdom. Also keep in mind, that sexuality and reproductive behaviours are not one and the same thing.

Doesn't the Bible condemn homosexuality?

Some Biblical Scholars believe that the Bible condemns homosexuality, others do not. Different denominations use the Bible as a basis for their faith, yet beliefs between the churches can be quite diverse. Throughout history some mainstream Christian churches have used the Bible to justify slavery, racism, child abuse, domestic violence and sexism. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. used the scriptures to inspire those struggling to overcome racism at the same time others used the Bible to promote racial segregation and violence. Obviously, the Bible can be interpreted in many different ways. Out of the 31,173 verses contained in the Bible, there are less than a dozen that allegedly deal with the topic of homosexuality. The meaning of these verses remains fairly obscure to many Biblical scholars, especially in the context of loving committed relationships. Jesus himself said nothing, which leads people to believe the subject of homosexuality was not a concern. Interestingly enough, the word homosexual did not appear in any translation of the Bible until 1946 (Blumenfeld & Raymond, 1988). Likewise, there are words in the Greek language for same-sex sexual activities, yet they never appear in the original text of the New Testament (Blumenfeld & Raymond, 1988).

But my church teaches, and I believe, that homosexuality is morally wrong.

As citizens of this country we have the right to pursue the faith of our choice without fear of persecution; but, as citizens of this country we also have the responsibility to insure that no one person's beliefs, religious or otherwise, interfere with other persons basic civil rights. Some religious faiths teach that eating meat or consuming caffeine is wrong. Others prohibit

dancing, the use of modern technology, eating pork or the use of birth control. These people have the right to live by the teaching of their faiths, but they do not have the right to insist all people live by their personal beliefs. Our government is not a theocracy based on Biblical law. Legislation must reflect a tolerance for diversity in extending basic civil rights to all citizens with respect for the common good of society.