

TWU Counseling Center

Myths & Assumptions about LGB People

- ***Being gay is contagious***
Most LGB individuals were raised by straight parents. Sexual orientation is most likely determined by genetics.
- ***Gay people recruit others to be gay***
Sexual orientation can't be changed. Gay people are attracted to other gays. This myth may come from the fact that many gay people don't come out until they are older, when they meet someone to whom they are attracted. This doesn't mean that they weren't gay before, just that they hadn't come out yet. Gay people do not sexually stalk straight individuals for casual sex.
- ***There are specific gender roles in gay relationships***
There are a variety of forms of gay relationships, just as heterosexual relationships. Sometimes there may be specific roles for each person, sometimes these roles are very flexible. Original butch/femme roles may have come from imitating heterosexual roles.
- ***Gay men want to look like women and lesbians want to look like men***
Some gay men do enjoy wearing women's clothes, but most don't. Most conform to cultural expectations for men's dress. Lesbians usually do not want to look like men. Their choice of dress is more often determined by comfort and, possibly, by rebelling against stereotyped ideas of what women should look like. Some lesbians enjoy dressing very feminine.
- ***Gay people could change if they want to***
Research has repeatedly shown this is not true--that sexual orientation is something we are born with. Examples of people who claim to have changed their orientation usually indicate someone who has changed their behavior in response to internal or external pressure to be heterosexual. This is often at great cost to self, because basic feelings haven't changed.

Sexual orientation emerges for most people in early adolescence without any prior sexual experience. And some people report trying over many years to change their sexual orientation from homosexual to heterosexual with no success. For these reasons, psychologists don't consider sexual orientation for most people to be a conscious choice that can be voluntarily changed. The American Psychological Association has made several official statements that conversion therapy is unethical.
- ***Therapy could cure homosexuality***
Treatments that claim to cure homosexuality are just successful in coercing heterosexual behavior—you cannot change a person's inner feelings about their basic orientation.
- ***People are gay because they were sexually abused***
Most people who were sexually abused do not take on a gay identity. Gay and lesbian people, just as heterosexuals, may have been abused, but this has no relation to their sexual orientation. Straight women who have been sexually abused by men may have difficulty relating to men, but this does not mean they are lesbians.
- ***Gay persons sexually molest children***
Approximately 95% of child molesters are heterosexual men. A molester who abuses boys is not usually gay--many will abuse children of either gender.
- ***Gay people do not have stable or long relationships***
Even though gay and lesbian relationships do not have the social supports which heterosexual relationships have, many gays and lesbians form long-term, monogamous, stable relationships and consider themselves to have a lifetime commitment to each other. Many heterosexual people have trouble forming stable relationships; so do some gay, lesbian and bisexual people.

- ***Gay people do not have children***
Many gays and lesbians are parents. They may have children from a prior heterosexual relationship (many come out later in life). They may also choose to have children within their gay or lesbian relationship, by adoption or artificial insemination.
- ***Homophobia only exists in straight people***
Homophobia--an irrational fear of homosexuals or of being homosexual--exists in straight, gay, lesbian, and bisexual people growing up in a culture that oppresses people who are not heterosexual. Gays, lesbians, and bisexuals have homophobic feelings just as straight people do. They have internalized these feelings from the culture, and often have problems with self-hatred and lack of self-acceptance.
- ***If a person has sex with opposite sex, then they can't be gay***
Many people do not realize they are gay until later in life, partly because of the negative views our society holds of gay people. Prior to this they may have heterosexual relationships. Some gays and lesbians also engage in heterosexual relationships in an effort to hide or deny their gay/lesbian identity. And many people are not exclusively either heterosexual or homosexual. They may find themselves attracted to people of either gender. At different times they may engage in both heterosexual and homosexual relationships.
- ***Gay people can't control their sexual urges***
Gay people have the same range of level of sexual desire as others. This myth may arise from defining gay people by their sexual behavior, i.e., being gay or lesbian is all about whom you have sex with. Many other factors go into LGB identity.
- ***Coming out is a one time process***
For most gay people, coming out is a lifetime process. In any new situation or relationship, the gay person must decide how out to be. These situations can include simple activities (i.e. shopping, opening a joint checking account, picking out furniture, buying jewelry, taking your child to the doctor, attending parent night at school, or having company over to your home).
- ***Gay people are not happy because they isolate themselves***
Some gay people are isolated because of fear of disclosing their gay identity. However, many are active in gay and lesbian communities and find that a great source of support. Except for how they are affected by oppression, there is nothing to indicate gay people are any less happy than others.
- ***Hollywood portrayals of gay people are accurate***
Hollywood reinforces gay and lesbian stereotypes and prejudices. There are few accurate portrayals. The media often focuses on the individuals behaving in extreme ways (e.g., during gay pride marches, acting effeminate).
- ***Discrimination only impacts racial and ethnic minority groups***
There is extensive discrimination against LGB people. People can be fired, lose custody of their children, experience housing discrimination, etc. In most states there are no civil rights protection for LGB people. GLB's are not eligible for federal jobs (prisons) or military positions. Security checks still inquire about sexual orientation.
- ***Being gay is a mental illness***
The APA has determined that being gay is not a mental illness. Research has shown that being homosexual is not associated with emotional or social problems. However, many LGB people experience distress due to oppression and homophobia. Objective scientific research over the past 35 years has consistently shown that homosexual orientation, in and of itself, is not associated with emotional or social problems.

In 1973, the American Psychiatric Association removed the term "homosexuality" from the official manual that lists all mental and emotional disorders. In 1975, the American Psychological Association took the same action. Both associations urge all mental health professionals to help dispel the stigma of mental illness that some people still associate with LGB orientation.

DEFINING TERMS

⇒ ***Gay***

Can be either male or female. Someone whose primary sexual/emotional attraction is toward someone of same gender

⇒ ***Lesbian***

Term representing gay women, although some women prefer to be called “gay”.

⇒ ***Bisexual***

Attracted to both men and women. May form relationships with either gender at different times in life.

⇒ ***Heterosexual***

Primary attraction is toward someone of opposite gender.

⇒ ***Transgender***

Experiences conflict between biological gender identity and inner feeling of being male or female. May feel like a man in woman's body or vice versa. May pursue surgery to change physical gender.

⇒ ***Homophobia***

Irrational fear of homosexuals or of being homosexual.

⇒ ***Heterosexism***

The assumption of the inherent superiority of heterosexuality, obliviousness to the lives and experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people, presumption that all people are, or should be, heterosexual. A systematic set of institutional and cultural arrangements which reward and privilege people for being or appearing to be heterosexual while establishing potential punishments or lack of privilege for being or appearing to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered. (Evans, N. J., & Rankin, S., 1997)

Compiled by Dr. Carmen Cruz and Courtney Aberle of the TWU Counseling Center