
REFERENCES

American Civil Liberties Union:
<http://www.aclu.org/lgbt/parenting/>

American Psychological Association:
<http://www.apa.org/pubinfo/answers.html>

Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network
(GLSEN) Colorado:
<http://www.glsen.org/index.htm>

Human Rights Campaign, *A Straight Guide to
GLBT Americans*: <http://www.hrc.org/>

McGill University, Montreal, Quebec:
<http://www.mcgill.ca/studenthealth/information>

Parents, Family & Friends of Lesbians & Gays:
<http://www.pflag.org>



Dubuque Human Rights Commission
1300 Main St.
Dubuque, IA 52001
Phone: 563-589-4190
Fax: 563-589-4299
E-mail: humanrgt@cityofdubuque.org
Website: www.cityofdubuque.org

MYTHS & FACTS ABOUT GAY & LESBIAN PEOPLE



It is important to remember that most of the negative stereotypes of gay, lesbian, and bisexual people are based on erroneous or inadequate information. Here are some myths and facts to consider:

MYTH: Lesbians and gay men are protected by civil rights laws in this country.

FACT: There are 17 states in the U.S. that explicitly protect lesbian and gay people. Eight states include sexual orientation and gender. Nine include sexual orientation only. One state protects in employment only. As a city, Dubuque has added sexual orientation as a protected characteristic in the human rights ordinance. In most places in the U.S., gay men, lesbians and bisexuals can be legally fired from their jobs regardless of job performance or seniority. They can also be denied the right to housing without any legal recourse. Lesbian and gay parents can, and often do, lose custody of their children without any discussion of their parenting skills. In short, it is legal to discriminate, except in states and cities where sexual orientation is a specific protected class.

MYTH: It's a "choice."

FACT: It is generally accepted there is some predisposition or genetic relationship to sexual orientation, but not every one agrees. Many scientists believe sexual orientation is set at birth, certainly by age five. Research on the DNA of gay, male twins shows that genetics plays a role in establishing sexual orientation. The research of Dr. Alfred Kinsey suggests few people fit into either strictly homosexual or heterosexual categories. Many people now view sexuality on a continuum, rather than categories in opposing "camps." The actual choice is whether or not to live one's life openly and honestly with oneself and others.

MYTH: It is "not natural" to be lesbian or gay.

FACT: Research suggests homosexuality is almost universal among animals and is especially frequent among highly developed species. There has been evidence of homosexuality in all human cultures throughout history. Studies have estimated that 10% of the population classify themselves as lesbian or gay. Judd Marmor, Professor of Psychiatry at USG Medical School, has calculated that 1 in every 4 families has a member (parent or child) who is lesbian or gay.

MYTH: People become gay or lesbian because of negative relationships with the opposite sex.

FACT: Homosexuality is not a negative relation to the opposite sex but a stronger, more powerful desire for emotional and physical intimacy with same-sex individuals.

MYTH: Gay and lesbian people can “change” or be “cured.”

FACT: In 1990, the American Psychological Association stated that scientific evidence shows reparative therapy does not work, and it can do more harm than good. In 1998 the American Psychiatric Association stated, “psychiatric literature strongly demonstrates that treatment attempts to change sexual orientation [i.e. reparative therapy] are ineffective. However, the potential risks are great, including depression, anxiety, and self-destructive [suicidal] behavior....” Most gay men and lesbians have no desire to be “cured” (heterosexual). Some, however, find that accepting their sexual orientation is difficult, given the prejudice they face.

MYTH: Being gay or lesbian is a mental illness.

FACT: In 1973, the American Psychiatric & Psychological Associations removed homosexuality from the list of mental disorders. The National Institute for Mental Health found no greater incidence of mental illness among lesbians and gays than among heterosexuals.

MYTH: Most pedophiles are gay men.

FACT: Over 90% of child molestation is committed by heterosexual males against minor females. Studies have shown no correlation between a man’s sexual orientation and a tendency to sexually abuse children. Pedophilia—sexual attraction to children—should not be confused with homosexuality.

MYTH: Gay and lesbian people are promiscuous.

FACT: Like heterosexuals, many gays/lesbians are involved in stable, monogamous relationships. Most gay/lesbian relationships are based on emotional and friendship bonds as well as sexual intimacy; in other words, the same relationship ingredients as any heterosexual relationship. Of course some of these relationships have problems, as do some heterosexual relationships. At the same time, gay relationships may be harder to maintain, as they are not sanctioned or supported by this society, at this time.

MYTH: AIDS is a homosexual disease.

FACT: This is a commonly held myth. In reality, the risk of exposure to HIV is related to a person’s behavior, not their sexual orientation. What’s important to remember about HIV/AIDS is that it is a preventable disease through the use of safe sex practices and by not sharing needles associated with drug use.

MYTH: Gay and lesbian people are easy to identify.

FACT: People often use stereotypes to identify a person’s sexual orientation, such as saying that gay men are “flamboyant” and lesbians are “butch.” In a study conducted to see if people could accurately identify a person’s sexual orientation after watching a series of videotaped interviews, close to 80% of the subjects were unable to identify the person’s sexual orientation (Berger et al, 1987).

MYTH: People cannot be gay and happy.

FACT: In 1994, the American Medical Association stated, “Most of the emotional disturbance experienced by gay men/lesbians around their sexual identity is not based on physiological causes; rather it is due more to a sense of alienation in an unaccepting environment.” This means the discrimination and stress gay/lesbian people face is the root cause of a lot of pain. That pain can be alleviated by knowing there is a community of gay/lesbian people and straight-supportive Americans who know and care about them and the issues they face.

MYTH: Gay and lesbian people try to convert others to be homosexual.

FACT: Attempts by gay and lesbian people to educate others about what it means to be gay or lesbian can be misconstrued as attempts to convert people. Access to information about homosexuality does not make someone gay or straight, though it may help them better understand their own sexuality.

MYTH: In homosexual relationships one person always plays the role of husband and the other wife.

FACT: Invariably people ask which partner is the man and which is the woman. Research has shown most lesbians and gay men actively reject traditional husband-wife or masculine-feminine roles as a model for their relationships. Clear-cut or obvious husband-wife roles are uncommon.

MYTH: Children raised by gay or lesbian parents are less mentally healthy than other children.

FACT: According to the 2000 census, more than 1 million children are being raised by same-sex couples nationwide. Some people fear that gay or lesbian parents are not as loving, responsible or dependable as heterosexual parents; however, the American Psychological Association and other major medical and scientific researchers have stated that children of gay and lesbian parents are as mentally healthy as children raised by heterosexual parents.

MYTH: Children raised by gay or lesbian parents will grow up to be gay.

FACT: All available evidence demonstrates sexual orientation of parents has no impact on the sexual orientation of their children and that children of lesbian and gay parents are no more likely than any other child to grow up to be gay. Homosexual parents cannot *impose* their sexual orientation on their children. Of course, some children of lesbians and gay men will grow up to be gay, as will some children of heterosexual parents.

MYTH: Only gay and lesbian people should initiate discussions about gay issues.

FACT: It is often unsafe for gay/lesbian people to bring up such issues because of the possibility of physical harm or discrimination. Straight people can initiate discussions, use inclusive language, and express general acceptance of gay folks.