"WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THE GAY LIFESTYLE?"

Supportive Data for Responses to Individual Items

1. Gay people can ordinarily be identified by certain mannerisms or physical characteristics.

Gays come in as many different shapes, colors and sizes as do heterosexuals. Only a very small percentage can be identified by stereotypic mannerisms and characteristics. In fact, many heterosexuals portray a variety of the so-called gay stereotypic characteristics. Some members of different subcultures may tend to mimic or imitate specific behaviors in an effort to "fit in". (Note: Discuss how members of "popular" subcultures tend to "look alike" and "act alike"; such as: members of fraternities and sororities; "administrators"; athletes; "Punkers" and "New Wavers"; etc.)

2. In a gay relationship one partner usually plays the "husband"/"butch" role and the other plays the "wife"/"femme" role.

This is an old pattern that was evident in some gay relationships when gays had only the traditional heterosexual relationship as a model. Today, most gays work to develop relationships based on the principles of equality and mutuality where they are loved and appreciated for "who they are", not for the roles they are supposed to play. There is no right or wrong way that prescribes how to divide roles between partners. Often gays perform preferred tasks and share those that are less desirable (i.e., laundry, cleaning, paying bills, etc.)

3. We do not know what causes homosexuality.

This is by far one of the more controversial issues for gays. It is not yet known what specifically causes either homosexuality or heterosexuality. Some believe it is predetermined genetically or hormonally. Others maintain that all humans are predisposed to all variations of sexual/affectional behavior and "learn" a preference or orientation. Clearly, much further research is needed in this area.

Caution:
Some people may ask the question of causation in an attempt to "find a cure". It may be more helpful to de-emphasize the importance of exploring the causation issue by citing how homosexuality has existed in cultures around the world for centuries. It has been a constant part of societies throughout history. The question, therefore, may not be what "causes" it, but how can we come to better understand and accept all of the complexities of homosexuality.

4. Most gay people could be cured by having really good sex with a member of the opposite sex.

There are no "cures". Many gays have had satisfying heterosexual experiences in their lifetime. According to the Kinsey research, some gays/bisexuals are comfortable being sexually active with heterosexuals as well.

Gays who out of desperation or fear, choose to enter a heterosexual relationship "to get cured" may cause undue misery and pain to themselves and their partners. Most gays would never choose to be sexually active with members of the other sex and would resent and challenge the inference that heterosexuals have a corner on the market of "good sex".

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5. The majority of child molesters are gay.

Over 90% of child molestation is committed by heterosexual men against young girls. The overwhelming majority of homosexuals have no interest in pre-adolescent children.

6. Most gay people regard themselves as members of the opposite sex.

Most, if not all gays, are comfortable with their femaleness or maleness. Being gay must not be confused with being transsexual, where one feels trapped in the body of the wrong sex and, therefore, may seek surgery to "rectify" the matter.

7. Homosexuality is not "natural"—that is, it does not exist in nature, therefore, that proves that it is dysfunction.

From a scientific point of view, it is "natural". Any animal, including humans, is capable of responding to homosexual stimuli. Research suggests that homosexuality is almost universal among all animals and is especially frequent among highly developed species. There has been evidence of homosexuality in all human cultures throughout history. In fact, one anthropological study of non-Western cultures found that 64% of their sample considered homosexuality "normal and socially acceptable" for certain members of the society.

8. Gay people should not be teachers because they will try to convert their students to the gay lifestyle.

Homosexual "conversion"/seduction is no more common than is heterosexual seduction. Most gay teachers live with the fear that they will be fired immediately if they are "found out". Most, if not all, gays have no desire to "convert" students. Unfortunately, their efforts to provide support for younger gays may be misconstrued and misrepresented. If, in fact, the data are correct that suggest that sexual orientation is established by age 3-6, then contact with teachers would have no effect on students.

9. Gay people have made a conscious decision to be gay.

(Refer to #3 for the issue of causation).

While researchers continue to disagree on the specific "causes" of homosexuality, they mostly agree that there is some sort of predisposition or genetic relationship involved. The "decision" may not be whether one is going to be gay or not, but rather whether one is going to acknowledge the existence of personal homosexual feelings and behaviors. "Coming out" is a very complex and difficult process. It may take a long time for many gays to "choose" to accept their homosexuality as a valid and normal lifestyle. Those who struggle with their gay identity may suffer enormous anxiety, pain, and anger as they work to rectify the inherent incongruence between societal messages and their own feelings and preferences.

10. There are very few "bisexuals"; most people are either completely homosexually or heterosexually oriented.

The pioneering studies of Dr. Alfred Kinsey and his associates are most frequently cited on this question. This data suggested that, in fact, few people are either predominantly heterosexual or homosexual. Most people fall somewhere on the continuum between these two ends of the scale, and thus have the capacity to experience both affectional and sexual feelings for members of both sexes.
11. There are some significant differences between the lifestyles of gay men and lesbians.

Ideally, there should be no inherent or "prescribed" differences in intimate relationships of any kind; however, current societal pressures on all men and women often result in distinct differences. All men, not just gay or straight, are typically "expected" to be "macho" and allowed to engage in more short-term relationships than women. Consequently, it may be more difficult for gay men to develop and maintain long-term and stable monogamous relationships. In addition many women are socialized to believe that long-term monogamy is "right". Those who maintain that "people are people regardless of gender" may in fact believe that once societal sex role stereotypes are discarded, then everyone will feel more free to choose from among a variety of lifestyles. Until this happens all gay men and lesbians suffer from the predominance of heterosexual sex roles in a society where few gays have chosen to provide alternative role models for the "public eye".

12. Homosexuality is a type of mental illness and can be cured by appropriate psychotherapy.

In 1973 the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its list of mental disorders.

In 1975 the American Psychological Association went further to state that, "Homosexuality, per se, implies no impairment in judgement, stability, reliability, or general social or vocational capacities."

Most, if not all, psychiatrists have had little real success in their attempts to "cure" gays through psychotherapy.

13. One homosexual experience as an adolescent will play a large part in determining whether a person will be homosexually-oriented as an adult.

Many young boys and girls (far more than 10% of our population) have homosexual experiences in their childhood as part of the natural exploration of one's sexuality. If this statement were true, then the percentage of gays in the population would be far greater than 10%.

Note:
Further resources on myths and facts are available in the appendix:

1. "Commonly Asked Questions About Homosexuality"
2. "20 Questions About Homosexuality: A Political Primer"

The Rainbow Flag
The Rainbow Flag has been adopted by the gay, lesbian, bisexual community as its own design. It depicts not the shape of the rainbow, but the colors in horizontal stripes. Created in 1978 for San Francisco's Gay Freedom Celebration by local artist, Gilbert Baker, it was inspired by the "Flag of the Races" which had five-stripes—one each for the colors of humankind's skin, flown during the 1960's college campus demonstrations. It is also a symbol of the diversity and many color of the gay community. Its success is not due to any official recognition, but to the widespread spontaneous adoption by members of the community it represents.

The Labrys
The double-bladed ax comes from the myth as the scepter of the Goddess Demeter (Artemis). It may have originally been used in battle by female Scythian warriors or Amazon women or as an agricultural tool used by women during matriarchal times. The labrys appears in ancient Cretan art and has become a symbol of lesbianism.

The Lambda
Chosen by Gay Activist Alliance in 1970 as the symbol of the gay movement, the lambda is the Greek letter "L". A battle flag with the lambda was carried by a regiment of ancient Greek warriors which were accompanied in battle by their young male lovers and noted for their fierceness and willingness to fight until the death. In 1974 the 1st International Gay Rights Congress, Convened in Scotland, accepted the lambda as the international symbol for gay and lesbian rights.

Lavender
A color usually used by women who are bisexual or lesbian to reflect their invisibility. Was chosen by the gay community to represent gays and lesbians because it is a mixture of pink and blue.

Freedom Rings
Designed by David Spada with the Rainbow Flag in mind, these six colored aluminum rings have come to symbolize independence and tolerance of others. They were quickly adopted by the gay community. The rings are frequently displayed or worn as jewelry and can be found on necklaces, bracelets, rings and keychains.
Symbols of Pride

Listed below are some symbols that have been adopted by gays, lesbians, bisexuals and their allies along with the significance of each:

Stonewall & Pride Celebrations
On June 28, 1969, a routine raid on the Stonewall Bar on Christopher Street in New York City turned into a riot when patrons resisted. The police barricaded themselves inside the bar. The riot escalated until reinforcements arrived. The riots continued for several evenings. This rebellion begun by drag queens and bar patrons marked the beginning of the modern gay and lesbian movement. Each June, pride marches, rallies and celebrations are held throughout the nation commemorating Stonewall.

Double Women’s Symbol
Also known as "the mirror of Venus." This symbol represents the planet Venus, metal, copper and femininity. The double woman’s symbol represents woman loving woman.

Double Man’s Symbol
Derived from the astrological symbol of Mars. Mars was the Greek God of War and patron of warriors. The arrow is a phallic symbol. A double man’s symbol represents man loving man.

The Pink Triangle
Concentration camp prisoners during W.W.II were classified by a set of colored triangles, pink was reserved for homosexuals. During the 1940s, the pink triangle has become one of the most recognizable and powerful symbols for gay people and the oppression they have faced throughout Western History. This symbol was reclaimed and inverted to symbolize the liberation movement of the gay community. A pink triangle means never forget, never go back, never again.

The Black Triangle
Worn by lesbians as well as other political and social misfits in the concentration camps. Although there is less documentation surrounding this symbol and the plight of lesbians during the Holocaust, it is currently being reclaimed by lesbians as a symbol of liberation.
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Things That Discourage People From Becoming Allies

1. Being labeled a gay, lesbian, or bisexual by the heterosexual population ("guilty by association"). This label can cause difficulties for the heterosexual when looking for a significant other.

2. Allies are often mocked or ridiculed by heterosexuals that view the issue as unimportant and unpopular.

3. Allies may become alienated by friends and colleagues that are not comfortable with the topic. These people may noticeably distance themselves from the ally in order to avoid conflict or labels.

4. Allies may become victim of overt or subtle discrimination such as not getting appointed to a committee, a negative reflection on an evaluation, or needing to look for a position that is more supportive of their views.

5. The gay, lesbian, bisexual community may not accept the ally, and believe that the person is just not ready to admit that they are really a member of the gay community.

6. Learning the culture and language may be difficult if not impossible without the assistance of a member of the oppressed group.

7. Due to some past experiences with heterosexuals, the gay, lesbian, bisexual population may question an ally's motivation.

RESOURCES

NATIONAL

- Federation of Parents and Friends of lesbians and Gays (P-FLAG)
  Box 20308, Denver, CO 80208
  (303) 321-2270

- Fund for Human Dignity
  666 Broadway, New York, NY 10012
  (212) 529-1600 or 1-800-SOS-GAYS

- Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against defamation (GLASS)
  99 Hudson Street #1400, New York, NY 10013
  (212) 966-1700

- The Gayellow Pages
  Box 292 Village Station, New York, NY 10014
  (212) 674-1020

- Hetrick-Martin Institute
  401 West Street, New York, NY 10014
  (212) 633-8920

- Human Rights Campaign Fund
  1012 14th St. NW #607, Washington DC 20005
  (202) 628-4160

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

- Lesbian Rights Project
  137- Mission St., San Francisco, CA 94103
  (415) 621-0674

- Men of All Colors together
  P.O. Box 1518, Ansonia Station, New York, NY 10023

- National Coalition of Black Lesbians and Gays
  19641 West Seven Mil, Detroit, MI 48219
  (313) 573-0484

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

- And the Band Played On, Randy Shilts
- Another Country, James Baldwin
- Bi Any Other Name, Hutchinson & Kaahumanu, eds.
- Big Gay Book, John Preston
- Brother to Brother, Essex Hemphill
- Chicano Lesbians, Carla Trujillo, ed.
- Coming Out to Parents, Mary Borhek
- Conduct Unbecoming, Randy Shilts
- Culture of Desire, Frank Browning
- Daddy's Roommate, Michael Willhoite
- The Faber Book of Gay and Lesbian Shorts Fiction, Edmund White, ed.
- Looking at Gay and Lesbian Life, Warren Blumenfeld & Diane Raymond
- Loving Someone Gay, Don Clark
- Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers, Lillian Faderman
- Now That You Know, Betty Fairchild & Nancy Hayward
- Positively Gay, Betty Berzon & Robert Leighton
- Possessing the Secret of Joy, Alice Walker
- Rubyfruit Jungle, Rita Mae Brown
- Queer In America, Michaelangelo Signorile
- Six of One, Rita Mae Brown
- A Stone Gone Mad, Jacquelyn Holt Park
- Surpassing the Love of Men, Lillian Faderman
- Tales of the City, Armistead Maupin

FILMS

- Too Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything Julie Newmar
- Desert Hearts
- Longtime Companions
- Torch Song Trilogy
- Jeffrey
- The Adventures of Two Girls In Love
- The Wedding Banquet
- Parting Glances
- Fried Green Tomatoes
- My Beautiful Launderette
- I've Heard the Mermaids Singing
- Maurice
- Paris is Burning
- Lost Language of Cranes
- An Early frost
- Doing Time on Maple Drive
- Clair of the Moon
- Philadelphia
- La Cage Aux Folles
FILMS (CONT.)

- The Birdcage
- The Naked Civil Servant
- Before Stonewall: the making of gay and lesbian community

MAGAZINES AND PUBLICATIONS

- Advocate
- Deneuve
- Genre
- Journal of Homosexuality
- Out
- 10 Percent
- Gay People’s Chronicle
- OutLook
TIPS ON STRENGTHENING YOUR FOUNDATION

1. Examine and be aware of your own baggage. Reflect honestly on your fears and attitudes regarding gays, lesbians and bisexuals. Challenge your own homophobia/biphobia stereotypes.

2. Educate yourself. Read books and watch films that focus on and affect gays, lesbians, and bisexuals, and the rest of society. Keep an active awareness of current social and political events. Talk about what you learn with others, gay and straight.

3. Challenge your own conceptions about gender-appropriate roles and behaviors. Do not expect people to perform according to society's expectations of "men" and "women". Support those that do not fit traditional gender roles.

4. Do not assume that you know "what gays are about" or that there is one way to be gay, lesbian or bisexual. Acknowledge the diversity within the gay/lesbian/bisexual community. Treat everyone as individuals.

5. Do not assume that a person of the same gender is attracted to you just because of their sexual orientation. If any interest is shown, be flattered, not flustered. Treat any interest a person might show just as you would if it came from straight person of the opposite sex.

6. Do not assume that everyone you meet is straight. Respect what a person reveals or does not reveal about his/her sexuality.

7. Avoid making a point of your own heterosexuality. ("I have gay friends, but I'm straight.") If someone mistakes you for gay, lesbian or bisexual do not treat it as an assault, or rush to correct the idea.

8. Practice being a good role model. Use non-heterosexist language, attitudes, and behaviors. Use terms such as "significant other". Ask "Are you seeing someone?", rather than "Do you have a boyfriend/girlfriend?". Ask about relationships rather than marriages.

9. Challenge and confront heterosexist/homophobic statements, jokes, and attitudes of others. Silence only condones and reinforces injustice.

10. Expect to make mistakes. We all do. Learn from them, and keep on trying.

Adapted by Ryan L. Tarpley from: the Social Issues Training Project of the University of Massachusetts; BGLA of Lawrence university; and GLBU of Macalester college.
Qualities of an GLB Ally

1. Has worked to develop an understanding of homosexuality and bisexuality and the needs of gays, lesbians and bisexual persons. Is comfortable with their knowledge of gender identity and sexual orientation.

2. Chooses to align with gays, lesbians and bisexual individuals and represents and responds to their needs, especially when they are unable to safely do so themselves.

3. Believes that it is in her/his self-interest to be an ally of GLB individuals.

4. Is committed to the personal growth required, in spite of the possibility of discomfort and pain.

5. Is able to acknowledge and articulate how homophobia and other patterns of oppression and fear have operated in his/her life. Is willing to identify oppressive acts, and challenge the oppressive behaviors of others.

5.5 works to be an ally to all oppressed groups.

6. Expects support from other allies.

7. Is quick to take pride in, and appreciate successes in combatting homophobia and heterosexism and overcome fears.

7.5 'comes out of the closet' with his/her support and ally status.

8. Expects to make some mistakes, and does not use any feelings of guilt to become an ineffective ally or as an excuse for non-action.

9. Knows that both sides of the ally relationship have a clear responsibility for their own change whether or not persons on the other side choose to respond.

10. Knows that in the most empowered ally relationships, the persons in the homo/bi-sexual role initiate the change toward personal, institutional; and societal justice and equality.

11. Knows that she/he is responsible for humanizing or empowering their role in society, particularity as their role relates to responding to gays, lesbians and bisexual people.

12. Promotes a sense of community with the gay, lesbian and bisexual individuals, and teaches others about the importance of these communities, outreach, and respect. Encourages others to provide advocacy.
13. Has a good sense of humor.

GLCAC

15. Is not afraid to be called the same names, or to be harassed in the same ways as those they are acting as an ally for.

16. Is able to address/confront individuals without being defensive, sarcastic, or threatening.

Train the Trainers
17. Know your self-worth as an effective ally.

18. Understand your right to be concerned with the oppression of others.

19. Realize that others should and do want your allegiance.

20. Assume that people in the target group are already communicating to you in the best way they can at the present time. Also assume that they can and will do better. Decide how you can improve without making your support dependant upon their "improving" in any way. Think about what has bee helpful for you when you were in the target group position.

21. Appreciate the target group as "experts" in their own life experiences.

22. Realize that you have much to learn for your potential allies.

23. Give useful and meaningful input, based on your own experiences.

24. Recognize your conditioned role as "oppressor".

25. Recognize that you can identify the lies forced upon the oppressed.

26. Understand and appreciate the history of those allies and their oppression.

27. Become knowledgeable of internalized oppression and the issues that concern your potential allies.

28. Realize that others in the allied group are aware of conditioning you may have received as a possible oppressor.

29. Expect support; not gratitude from your potential allies.

30. Give your allegiance unconditionally.