

KINSEY SCALE AND OTHER RELEVANT STATISTICS

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1. Kinsey Scale

There have been a number of reputed studies on homosexuality in recent decades. The most widely discussed material came from the work of Dr. Alfred Kinsey and his associates in the late '40s and early '50s.

His results have been more recently supported by further research by Masters and Johnson and others.

The most revealing point from these studies is that there is a broad spectrum of sexual orientation, not just two lifestyles: heterosexual and homosexual. Instead of picturing sexual orientation as an either/or issue, Kinsey developed a seven-point continuum based on the degree of sexual responsiveness people have to members of the same and other sex:

- 0 = Exclusively heterosexual
- 1 = Predominantly heterosexual, incidentally homosexual
- 2 = Predominantly heterosexual, but more than incidentally homosexual
- 3 = Equally heterosexual and homosexual
- 4 = Predominantly homosexual, but more than incidentally heterosexual
- 5 = Predominantly homosexual, incidentally heterosexual
- 6 = Exclusively homosexual

He suggested that it is necessary to consider a variety of activities in assessing an individual's ranking on the continuum:

- * Fantasies
- * Dreams
- * Thoughts
- * Frequency of sexual activity
- * Emotional feelings

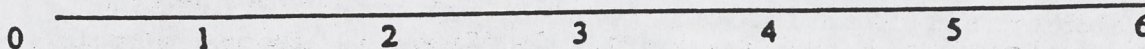
Therefore, many "heterosexuals," in fact, would fall somewhere between numbers 0-3 because they occasionally think/dream/fantasize about sexual activities with members of the same sex and/or occasionally act on these feelings. This graph illustrates some of the key findings from the Kinsey research:

6% of the adult male populations ranked a 6 over a three-year period

10% ranked 4-6
18% ranked 3-6

Ranks for women were about one-half that of men. (*Note: This research was conducted in the '40s and early '50s during a time of lower sexual activity for women.*)

SUGGESTED GRAPH



The interesting results for women concerned the relationship of incidence of lesbian relations with post-high school education. 17% of college-educated women and 24% of women with graduate degrees had at least one lesbian experience since puberty.

The following are additional statistics about men:

- * 37% of men had experienced an orgasm in a sexual activity with another male sometime in their lifetime
- * 60% of all men had some type of homosexual relationship before they were 16
- * 30% of all men had some type of homosexual relationship between the ages of 20 and 24

(Note: Facilitators are encouraged to do additional research in this area to develop further materials and a knowledge base to support this lecturette.)

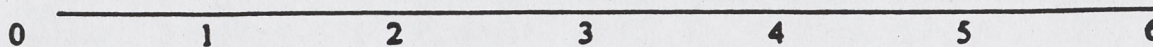
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TYPICALLY ASKED QUESTIONS AND SUGGESTED RESPONSES

We've tried to include in this section some information you might find helpful in answering the questions put to you in speaking engagements. *Keep in mind as you read through this material that we offer these questions and suggested replies primarily to stimulate your thinking. If you do not agree with a suggested reply, then do not use it.* Try to bring your disagreements up for discussion at a Bureau meeting. We do not expect to always agree on everything, and it is far better to be clear about our disagreements than not.

Many of the questions audiences ask reveal more about the questioner than the speaker. Many audiences use gay people as a vehicle for asking lots of questions about sexuality in general. High school students often ask about sex. College students usually want to know about the stability of relationships in our community. Audiences often attribute their own biases to other groups. For example, "In the best interests of children, gay people shouldn't have kids" might be a disguise for "I'm not comfortable with gay people raising children." Before you speak, *think about the audience and what to expect.*

"What causes homosexuality? Is it innate?"

The issues that determine either heterosexuality or homosexuality are very complex ones. There has been a lot of research done with no single conclusion. No one knows what makes people lesbian or gay, just as no one knows what makes people straight. The most recent research, as reported in a book called *Sexual Preference*, rules out all the psychoanalytic and environmental theories of causality. *Sexual Preference* points to the need for further research into the possibility of biological determinants of sexual orientation. Considering that homosexual people and heterosexual people cross all sociological, psychological, and economic definitions, one can only assume that both are normal and the product of many different factors.

Try to find out what question is *really* being asked here. Many audience members, from fear of their own tendencies, histories, or feelings, want a very clear definition of homosexuality. They want to believe that there is a line—on one side, homosexuals; on the other, heterosexuals. At the same time, people might be looking for some trace of heterosexuality within us, some point of reference. Many people assume that we are gay or lesbian because of a bad experience with the opposite sex. It is important to correct this assumption. You might point out that if every person became lesbian or gay because of a bad or sad heterosexual experience, there would be many more of us.

Because of their homophobia, many people assume that being lesbian or gay can *not* be a *choice* because no one would choose to be gay or lesbian. Also, if they see it as a choice, they might think it is just a "stage" and want us to "switch back." This issue of choice is a controversial one within our own community. It is helpful to share a variety of coming out experiences: those of us who knew from a very young age, lesbians coming out at age 75, gay men who have been married

and then fallen in love with another man, and so forth. At the same time, it is important to present a unified view of gayness and lesbianism as positive commitments and not dread experiences (except as a result of homophobia). We often try to explore with audiences why they feel that people are so homophobic.

2 "Is homosexuality natural?"

Strictly speaking, homosexuality is natural because it exists in nature. However, in asking this question, many audiences are really wondering if it is "normal." It is important to consider the value judgments which society attaches to concepts such as "natural" and "normal." The "rightness" or "wrongness" are the issues being raised here, not the naturalness or normalness of homosexuality.

Each culture or society throughout the world defines what is "natural" or "normal" to fit its own context, and these definitions differ. In many contemporary Western cultures, many people do not consider homosexuality to be normal. However, historians explain that homosexuality has existed since the earliest of human societies throughout the ages to the present day. It has been part of every culture, socioeconomic class, educational level, and race and has been observed in the wild in higher mammal species and other animals. Anthropologists Ford and Beach surveyed 76 societies outside of the West and found that in 64% "homosexual activity is considered normal and socially acceptable." There are also cultures where the definition of what it means to be homosexual differs. In some areas, a man who has sex with another man is not considered homosexual unless he is "on the bottom."

Often it is said that homosexual behavior is not "natural" because the "purpose" of sex is reproduction. However, not only are most heterosexual encounters not intended to produce children, but homosexuality is far more than just a sexual encounter. It is an emotional commitment to one or more other people of the same sex, and often connotes membership in a community. For the estimated 2.5 million lesbians and gay men in the United States, homosexuality is a normal, natural and satisfying way of life.

3 "Were you always lesbian or gay?"

This is a personal/political question. Each person's development of sexuality is unique. Each speaker, if so inclined, should respond according to his/her own experiences. Answers vary greatly and serve to illustrate the diversity among gay people. The questioner might also be

alluding to the question of causality: "Why are you gay or lesbian?" You might choose to mention that just as we do^{not} know the cause of heterosexuality, we don't know the cause of homosexuality. It might be instructive to point out that because gay people are a minority, we are often called upon to defend and explain ourselves. Be careful: the myth here is that if it's a choice, you can change—and if you weren't always lesbian or gay, you can "change back"!

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4
"Can you change?"

Often, implicit in this question is the notion that being gay or lesbian is being second best. The question also indicates a simplistic view of the development of sexual orientation and affectional preference. Changing one's sexual orientation is not a matter of waking up one morning and resolving to change. Behavior is easy (sometimes) to change, but *feelings* are not. And it is the *feelings* that define us as heterosexual or homosexual.

5
"How prevalent is homosexuality?"

Alfred Kinsey, in his studies of human sexuality, estimated that about 13% of the male population and 7% of the female population are exclusively gay or lesbian.¹ This does not include the 35-50% of the population that have had a homosexual experience at least once in their lives.

Lesbians and gay men have existed in all societies and in every historical period. Women formed lifelong partnerships called *Boston marriages* in the United States in the nineteenth century. Gay men were recognized as heroic warriors and lovers in ancient Greece and later annihilated in the Nazi concentration camps for "being like women and unable to fight," according to Himmler.

Gay people represent all racial, ethnic, economic, and religious backgrounds. There are active groups for lesbian and gay Catholics, Protestants, and Jews as well as atheists. Gay people have formed organizations such as gay and lesbian youth, disabled gays, Asian lesbians, and gay and lesbian parents. Some of us are teachers, your parents, your children, and your friends. Each of us knows someone who is gay or lesbian whether we are aware of it or not.

6
"Is homosexuality immoral?"

There are several texts which are frequently cited from the Bible as religious condemnations of homosexuality. It is important to ask if these passages are evidence of divine laws or reflections of the societal context in which the Old Testament was set. This is especially relevant because the Bible also encourages slavery and the inferiority of women (for example I Timothy 2:9-15; I Corinthians 14:34-35). It prohibits eating shrimp and shellfish (e. g. Leviticus 14), the use of face paint, and establishes many archaic dress and grooming codes. There are many rules within the Bible that are no longer taken literally.

Many of the biblical texts that have been used to bolster antigay and antilesbian literature are misreadings of the Bible. In fact, homosexuality is treated less seriously than the seven deadly sins, yet laziness, greed, and gluttony have not been grounds for castration, burning, or drowning. Some commonly cited texts (Leviticus 18:12, Genesis 9, I Corinthians 6:9, I Timothy 1:10) used to support antigay and antilesbian attitudes were actually intended to condemn sex outside of marriage, male prostitution, and marrying/loving someone from a different race or

¹ Kinsey, A. C., Pomeroy, W. B., and Martin, C. E. *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*. Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders, 1948. Kinsey, A. C., Pomeroy, W. B., and Martin, C. E. *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*. Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders, 1953.

country, and not homosexuality *per se*. Rather than the Bible, it was later theologians, spurred on by extrareligious concerns and cultural prejudices, who sought to make much of the relatively little antilebian and antigay sentiment contained in fundamental Judeo-Christian texts. The transition from tolerance to hostility "was almost wholly the consequence of the rise of corporate states and institutions with the power and desire to regulate increasingly personal aspects of human life" (John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality*).

Audiences often ask if you personally believe in God. Answer for yourself. You might also point out the variety of experiences on this question including naming some of the gay and lesbian religious groups (Dignity—Catholic, Integrity—Episcopal, Am Tikva—Jewish, Metropolitan Community Church—non-denominational, and so on). There are also many people who feel that there is a tension if not a contradiction between being religious and being gay. This stems partly from the rejection of gay people by most organized religions as well as many gay people's views that organized religion has little value or positive import.

For Christian audiences, you might note also that Jesus said nothing about homosexuality. Also, although noted for some of his alleged antigay passages, Paul wrote that Jesus' coming abolished all the laws of the Old Testament.

If you find yourself in a discussion or argument with a fundamentalist or right-wing Christian, ask for other people's opinions. You will not convince a fundamentalist of the morality of homosexuality even with a "God is love" approach. Try not to have a head-to-head confrontation. Good luck!

7 "Why do you say lesbian or gay instead of homosexual?"

Those of us who call ourselves lesbian and gay do so because *homosexual* is not what we named ourselves. *Homosexual* is what psychiatrists, lawyers, teachers, and clergy historically labeled sick, criminal, ignorant, and immoral. Naming ourselves is an essential step toward freedom. It is also important to note that the word "homosexual" seems to emphasize only our sexual orientation. *Gay* and *lesbian* are ways of labeling ourselves as multidimensional, fully loving human beings.

Statistically, one study (reported in *The Mendola Report*, by Mary Mendola) shows that approximately 60% of lesbians and 40% of gay men are involved in longterm committed relationships. External forces tend to encourage the breakup of lesbian and gay relationships. These are counteracted to a certain extent by pressure from within the community for stability and continuity. The statistics do not indicate what percentage of the community would like to be in a relationship nor does it reflect the numbers of gay people who define themselves as gay or lesbian but are not interested in being in a sexual involvement with another person.

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8
"Aren't gay men promiscuous?"

Some gay men choose to have a variety of partners, some don't. The word *promiscuous* seems to carry a negative connotation as it is applied to gay men. Having a variety of partners, or being non-monogamous, does not preclude the possibility of truly loving, intimate, stable relationships.

Sexuality and values within relationships also reflect our socialization. Men in general, gay or straight, are taught to express their sexuality differently from women. Men are trained in this society to be aggressive. The argument certainly can be made that "promiscuity" among gay men is more a function of socialization than gayness. If gay men are more "promiscuous" than straight men, it might reflect some realities about male conditioning more than about gayness, namely that men in this society are brought up with more control of their own sexuality.

You can also point out that the stereotype of promiscuity is rarely seen in relation to lesbians. Consider soliciting feedback from the group about their views of differences between men and women.

EROTOPHOBIA

9
"Are gay men and lesbians into 'roles'?"

Before the current women's and gay liberation movements which began in the 1960s in this country, there were very few options available for people other than the traditional heterosexual role model where men and women knew what was expected of them in a relationship with respect to attitude, behavior, and dress. Gay men and lesbians also had limited options and often chose to copy this heterosexual model where one member of a couple might have appeared to play the "butch" or masculine role and the other played the "femme" or feminine role.

A significant aspect of the lesbian and gay experience is that there are fewer rules or guidelines for intimate relationships than there are for heterosexuals. The vast majority of people in this country grow up in a heterosexually structured world. Boys and girls are taught the behaviors that are expected and those that are discouraged. From there, girls and boys learn how to relate to each other and form intimate relationships that reflect those different sex roles.

With the advent of women's liberation and gay and lesbian liberation movements, some of these roles have been publicly called into question. Women, in particular, have struggled against many aspects of the feminine role: passivity, servitude, confining and impractical dress, limited job opportunities and the like. Women have also asked men to change by beginning to relinquish the strict masculine role that sacrifices emotionality for rationalism. Some men have also begun to ask for more freedom to express different parts of themselves, to have closer relationships with their lovers and children. These changing attitudes are touching all parts of society.

At the same time, the very nature of gay and lesbian relationships—man loving man, woman loving woman—challenges the old structures and provides an impetus for change. Lesbians don't have a man to support them or take care of them. Out of survival, we widen our own ex-

periences and develop our potential; for example, by learning to do the kinds of home and auto repairs that most boys learned as teenagers. Similarly, lesbians are often in the forefront of movements for equal pay and better opportunities. **Gay men don't have a woman around the house to do the housework and to take care of our emotional needs.** Gay men have to learn how to find these resources internally. Because of these direct experiences, gay men and lesbians are appropriate models for those people seeking to break out of the traditional sex role patterns and often lead the movement for human liberation.

10 **"Have you ever had a relationship with a member of the opposite sex?"**

There might be a myth lurking beneath this question, that of the gay person as a failed heterosexual; "Women who have never had a relationship with a man will naturally turn to other women as love partners." You could suggest that one reason a woman might not have had a relationship with a man is that she had feelings for women that were stronger. Many gay people have had sexual relationships with members of the opposite sex. Some were "successful," some were not. You might want to talk about societal expectations here. We are gay or lesbian because our stronger sexual, emotional, erotic, and love bonds are with members of our own sex (same gender persons). *WETS HAVE HAD SAME-SEX EXPERIENCES BUT DON'T CONSIDER THEMSELVES GAY,*

11 **"Is everyone bisexual?"**

There are many different ways of defining and understanding bisexuality. For some, bisexuality defines a period of transition—for a person who has seen himself/herself as heterosexual and is newly uncovering gay or lesbian feelings. For others, bisexuality represents a genuine indifference to a person's gender—the ability to be equally attracted to either a man or a woman. For others, bisexuality implies an attraction to both sexes (although a preference might exist for one sex or the other).

Although many people have had both gay and straight relationships, fewer actually see themselves as bisexual. They either make a choice about their sexual orientation based on their view of their own preference or they make a choice by committing themselves to a particular individual. Even those of us who might see ourselves and others as innately bisexual in a different society, have to deal with the very real differences between men and women in this one.

You might also speak about the "sexual spectrum," which suggests that a person's sexual orientation fits someone on a continuum from exclusively heterosexual to exclusively homosexual, and that sexual orientation is not a static thing but can change along this continuum.

You might also point out the hidden question in this question, which is often combined with "Do you think you can ever be 'attracted' to a member of the opposite sex?"

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12 "Don't lesbians hate men? Don't gay men hate women?"

This question seems chock full of some powerful stereotypes about gay people: that all gay people have chosen homosexuality in rejection of heterosexuality; that a "choice" to be lesbian or gay necessarily dictates the withdrawal from half of the population; that the gay and lesbian experience is so alien to the rest of society that there is no point of connection between gay people and anyone else. It is valuable to point out that there are gay people who do make a choice to direct their energy and focus as much as possible on gay and lesbian members of their own sex. It is also valuable to discuss this very common phenomenon of gay men and straight women forming very close emotional ties. Certainly, "Some of my best friends are . . ." is one humorous approach. Also, when you take away the societal pressures of having to depend on the opposite sex for sexual and emotional satisfaction, often one is freed to have closer, more honest *friendships* with less pressure.

13 "Do homosexuals molest children?"

A survey of convictions for sex offenses involving juveniles in New Jersey (Ravich and Weiss, 1962) revealed that more than four-fifths of these cases involved male contacts with girls. In fact, by far the largest fraction of incidents of sexual abuse of children occurs at home: fathers or uncles molesting daughters or nieces. Most child molesters are male (98%); women (and lesbians) almost never molest children sexually. Among men, child molesting is as rare among homosexuals as it is among heterosexuals; maybe more so because a gay molester would far more likely be arrested and convicted than his heterosexual counterpart. The New York Board of Education has stated that, while there are many complaints on file about male teachers making sexual advances to female students, there have been *no* complaints about teachers making advances to children of the same sex.

This stereotype reflects the unfounded attitude that gay people have uncontrollable sex drives. Gayness and lesbiansim are not synonymous with sexual obsession or lack of control, and most gay people prefer to seek sexual connections which bring them equality and mutual support.

14 "What about man/boy love?"

This question is usually not phrased in this way. Members of the audience usually ask, "What do you think about men having sex with little boys?" It is important to immediately label the topic as "intergenerational sex," to point out that it is an issue that is not exclusive to the gay community, and to distinguish between consensual sex and forcible rape.

A dialogue on the issue of intergenerational sex is most helpful because it underscores the need for heterosexual people to address the issue as one that is relevant to the heterosexual community, and because a speaker cannot pretend to have all the answers about such a controversial topic.

Questions about intergenerational sex are almost always focused on men having sex with little boys. The media have recently given a lot of publicity to the North American Man-Boy Love

Association (NAMBLA) and almost always described that group's function as encouraging child molestation. NAMBLA's main purpose is support, not sex, and not rape. NAMBLA maybe is singled out for attack because it is a gay organization.

We have all read reports of "homosexual child molesting," "sex rings" and the like. We never read reports of "heterosexual child molesting" although the vast majority of child molestations occur between heterosexual men and young girls.

15

"Can you always tell a homosexual? You don't look gay!"

Gay men and lesbians are as varied in their dress, mannerisms, and styles as their heterosexual counterparts. There are many famous gay male football players and athletes, just as there are lesbians who fit a traditionally feminine image.

Similarly, there are many people who define themselves as heterosexual who appear to be gay or lesbian. That is particularly true with respect to transvestites. The vast majority of men who wear "women's" clothes define themselves as heterosexual. It is perhaps more obvious that the vast majority of women who wear "men's" clothes are not making a statement about their sexual orientation.

The stereotype of the swishy faggot or the motorcycle dyke is just a stereotype. This means that there are some lesbians who dress in masculine clothes and appear to be very tough and threatening to the heterosexual community, and there are some gay men with very effeminate mannerisms who appear to be mimicking women. Society seems to focus on these parts of the gay and lesbian community as representatives of all gay people. Although most gay people do not fit these stereotypes, those who do need to be recognized and supported for challenging the rigid sex roles and definitions of masculinity and femininity, which constrict everyone.

Somehow we are all given the message that we are not supposed to act so counter to our assigned gender roles. Straight people are told that deviating from the role means they are "queer" and therefore not acceptable. Gay people are often embarrassed by the extremes in the community and try to disassociate themselves from the "queens" and the "bull dykes." In reality, if these freedoms of expression were acceptable, all of us, gay and straight, would benefit.

16

"Do gay men want to be women? Do lesbians want to be men?"

Gay men and lesbians do not want to be the opposite sex. Because our society encourages defined roles for men and women, we all are raised with the ideas and images of what is "feminine" and what is "masculine." Men are expected to be strong, athletic, and emotionally reserved; women are expected to be fragile, nurturing, emotional, and passive. Within the gay and lesbian community, there are many people who have challenged and tried to discard some of these

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"Can you always tell a homosexual? You don't look gay!"

Gay men and lesbians are as varied in their dress, mannerisms, and styles as their heterosexual counterparts. There are many famous gay male football players and athletes, just as there are lesbians who fit a traditionally feminine image.

Similarly, there are many people who define themselves as heterosexual who appear to be gay or lesbian. That is particularly true with respect to transvestites. The vast majority of men who wear "women's" clothes define themselves as heterosexual. It is perhaps more obvious that the vast majority of women who wear "men's" clothes are not making a statement about their sexual orientation.

The stereotype of the swishy faggot or the motorcycle dyke is just a stereotype. This means that there are some lesbians who dress in masculine clothes and appear to be very tough and threatening to the heterosexual community, and there are some gay men with very effeminate mannerisms who appear to be mimicking women. Society seems to focus on these parts of the gay and lesbian community as representatives of all gay people. Although most gay people do not fit these stereotypes, those who do need to be recognized and supported for challenging the rigid sex roles and definitions of masculinity and femininity, which constrict everyone.

Somehow we are all given the message that we are not supposed to act so counter to our assigned gender roles. Straight people are told that deviating from the role means they are "queer" and therefore not acceptable. Gay people are often embarrassed by the extremes in the community and try to disassociate themselves from the "queens" and the "bull dykes." In reality, if these freedoms of expression were acceptable, all of us, gay and straight, would benefit.

16

"Do gay men want to be women? Do lesbians want to be men?"

Gay men and lesbians do not want to be the opposite sex. Because our society encourages defined roles for men and women, we all are raised with the ideas and images of what is "feminine" and what is "masculine." Men are expected to be strong, athletic, and emotionally reserved; women are expected to be fragile, nurturing, emotional, and passive. Within the gay and lesbian community, there are many people who have challenged and tried to discard some of these

stereotypes. Some gay men have tried to develop their "feminine" side by becoming more gentle and rejecting a macho image of masculinity. Many lesbians (along with the feminist movement) have abandoned the frailties and passivity associated with traditional female roles. By challenging stereotypes, gay people are not trying to be the opposite sex. Gay men may add to their maleness some female characteristics and lesbians may want some of the power and privilege which accompanies being male, but the essence of lesbianism and gayness is a celebration and affirmation of our gender and not a rejection of it.

17

"What was your family's reaction to your being gay?"

In our everyday experience, the only form of relationship that is sanctioned is the traditional heterosexual, nuclear family model. Being gay or lesbian is portrayed as a sickness, a perversion, or a source of unhappiness. It is not surprising that a parent who wants his/her child to be happy would be concerned about a child who is gay or lesbian. It is easy to see why they would have fears about what that lifestyle could mean, particularly in the absence of information or images of lesbians or gay men who are happy, healthy, and productive. Parents might see that their child is completely happy and at peace with him/herself, yet still blame themselves for "failing" to raise a "normal" child.

It is also important to understand why a child might choose to "come out" to his/her parents. Many parents feel that the child is throwing something in their face or trying to be hurtful. Often children come out to express honesty and to include parents in their lives, not to separate from them. Many children who have had to keep the secret find that they are not able to share any parts of their lives (who they are involved with, what kind of political work they do, what kind of social life they have, who their friends are, etc.). This secrecy can create tremendous distance and often results in real estrangement between parent and child.

Only when children take the risk to be open with parents can there be a relationship that has some meaning for both sides. Parents need to try to be understanding of their child without pretending that the new information is not difficult for them. It seems that this is a long process of talking with caring and honesty, which allows for a relationship to be rebuilt for parents and children.

One useful resource you can share is the existence of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) as a support group for parents.

18

"Do gay people make good parents?"

This is a question that is consistently raised in court whenever a lesbian mother or gay father is threatened with loss of custody or child visitation rights because of the parent's sexual orientation. It seems to be difficult enough for society to recognize the existence of lesbians and gay men as parents let alone to sanction this reality.

For those who dislike gay people, there exists a fear that a gay or lesbian parent will produce lesbian or gay children and not allow a child to choose his/her own sexual orientation. There is no evidence that a parent's sexual orientation plays a role in determining the child's orientation. Studies indicate that children of gay people are no more likely to be gay or lesbian than children of heterosexuals. After all, gay people are not following the pattern of their heterosexual parents.

Some people feel that a lesbian mother or gay father would be less capable of providing a loving, nurturing environment for a child. There is absolutely no evidence that a person's sexual orientation has any bearing on his/her capacity to be loving, responsible, and dependable as a parent. Our experience, if anything, indicates the opposite. Dr. Judd Marmor, past president of the American Psychiatric Association, states: "I know of no evidence that predominantly heterosexual parents are more loving, stable, or supportive in their parental roles than homosexual men and women." It is true that children might be subjected to the prejudice and ridicule that is directed at their gay or lesbian parents. However, the answer is to counter society's discrimination and not the parents or the children. Also, point out that gay people are less likely than heterosexual people to produce children by "accident" and that, therefore, children of gay people are more likely to be "wanted."

For lesbians or gay men who are co-parents (individuals who share a commitment to raising children who might not be their natural children), these questions or attitudes can be painful. Try to sort out for yourself your own feelings ahead of time. Remember that the audience might not be familiar with gay people. Let them understand the dilemma for a lesbian mother who cannot let the child's father know for fear of a custody battle. Explain some of the prejudice that is taken out on the child who is open about his/her parent's lifestyle. Audiences frequently try to put the blame for society's discrimination on you. Remind them (and yourself) that the reasons it is difficult to be a lesbian or gay parent or child come from homophobia, not gay or lesbian parenting. Be aware that some people use "the best interests of the child" as a disguise for their own homophobic attitudes.

19 "Don't you wish you could have children?"

Gay people are not precluded from having children just because of their gayness or lesbianism. There are many parents who realized they were lesbian or gay after having married and having had children. Some lesbians choose artificial insemination. Some gay and lesbian couples adopt children. And, of course, there is still the "natural" way. This might be a good time to mention that the notion of family is being redefined. Nuclear families, with mom at home and dad at the office, are no longer the norm.

20 "Is old age more difficult for lesbians and gay men?"

There is a stereotype that an aging gay person is destined for unhappiness and loneliness. This is based on several assumptions about gay people and old people: that gay people are attracted to each other only sexually; that older people lose their sexual ability; that gay people do not form lasting relationships; that the heterosexual experience of aging is more desirable. None of these

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assumptions is true. Aging is a difficult process for all people in this youth-oriented culture of Western industrialized society. The older person is often stripped of dignity and no longer viewed as productive. For heterosexual couples who are married, frequently one partner has died or the marriage has ended in divorce, leaving many older heterosexual people to live their lives alone.

The older gay person shares in these difficulties that accompany aging in this society. The gay or lesbian community is not immune to the ageism of the larger world and can perpetuate the exclusion of its older members. At the same time, however, many older gay men and lesbians have developed lifelong friendships, relationships, and communities that are more stable than the heterosexual counterpart of marriage. Many gay and lesbian "families" include people of all ages living together. Some gay people without children have planned group living arrangements so that the aging experience can be full and positive rather than lonely.

There are problems that do affect older gay men and lesbians more than the heterosexual elderly and are due to society's attitudes and lack of legal protection. For example, since there is no legal validation of gay and lesbian relationships, when a partner dies, the other is often left without any benefits from inheritance, insurance, or property which had been previously shared. Blood or "legal" relatives of the deceased can have wills contested. There is no legal protection for any gay person that his/her wishes will be respected after death. There have even been examples where the surviving partner of a relationship has been barred from the funeral because the relatives would not acknowledge the relationship.

21 "How prevalent is S & M in the gay community?"

It might be helpful to respond this question by first asking the questioner to define what (s)he means by "S & M." In doing so, you have begun to create a dialogue with your audience, underscoring one crucial point: S & M is not confined to the gay and lesbian communities. Due in part to selective media attention (for example, the movie *Cruising* and the television documentary *Gay Power, Gay Politics*), S & M sex is often associated exclusively with gay people.

S & M sex is a controversial topic, even within the gay and lesbian communities, so you might want to present a spectrum of opinion. Some speakers have stated that S & M sex is often an exploration of the power relationship between people. For most people who engage in it, S & M sex is an opportunity to play out a dominant/submissive fantasy in a controlled situation. Those people contend that almost everyone from time to time has dominant/submissive fantasies. It is better, they say, to express those fantasies in a safe setting than to suppress them, only to have them burst forth later in socially harmful ways. (It is important to note that S & M sex is consensual sex, as contrasted with non-consensual dominant/submissive activities in our society, such as wife and child abuse, the subjugation of women, and so forth.)

There are others who oppose S & M sex. They believe that even playing out dominant/submissive roles in a controlled setting is not healthy and merely reinforces society's predilection for unequal distribution of power in relationships.

22
"Why do gays and lesbians flaunt it?"

Most heterosexuals are truly unaware of the **flagrant flaunting of heterosexuality**. Give examples to point out the constant **assumption of heterosexuality** (advertising, wedding bands, family pictures, etc.). Provide some **sense of the ways in which gay people are forced to choose between "coming out" or lying** (for example: at work when a coworker asks if you have a girlfriend or boyfriend and wants to "fix you up"; in an interview when a prospective boss asks if you are married; in school when everyone is talking about who they have a crush on, etc.). Yet if the person chooses to answer truthfully, they are **accused of flaunting**. Ask how the heterosexual people in the audience would feel if they could never hold hands in public or acknowledge being involved in a relationship or married.

There is also a political dimension you can discuss. In order for gay men and lesbians to live in an environment where we are not victimized, some of us have to try and change society and people's attitudes. In order to make change, we have to be public about our existence.

23
"I don't care if you're lesbian or gay, but why do you have to make an issue of it?"

We are forced to make an "issue" out of it because there are many people who would eliminate us if they could. Our fight is, on one level, for survival.

It might also be helpful to point out all the heterosexual "flaunting" that bombards us every day in advertising and the media.

24
"What do you do in bed?"

You might point out the stereotype which equates every gay with sex and note your own discomfort with the question.

There are many possible responses to this question. Some speakers ask how people in the audience would feel if someone asked them for the details of their sex lives. (This can be done gently without chastising the individual for asking.) Other speakers point out that gay or lesbian sex is not any different from imaginative heterosexual sex except that there is no genital intercourse (coitus). Sometimes speakers talk about the myths of lesbian or gay sex (especially male) as being focused solely on unemotional, impersonal anal intercourse. They point out that gay and lesbian lovemaking is as much focused on sharing feelings and caring as heterosexual love. Some of us talk about the rare potential between same-sex lovers for an equality and sharing in making love that escapes most heterosexual sex because of male/female conditioning (that is, the male focus on coitus and his own pleasure determining the pace and content of heterosexual love).

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A stereotype of lesbian sex is that nothing happens. Some heterosexuals (particularly men) cannot imagine any sexual pleasure which does not include coitus. You can point out that sexual pleasure has no direct connection with coitus and that lesbian sex is really sex. Sometimes we point out that people of the same sex are already more familiar with what brings sexual pleasure through knowledge of their own bodies, thereby increasing the initial possibility for mutual pleasure. Sometimes we also admit that, even though it should be obvious (with a little thought or the use of a book) what gay people do in bed, it is a very frightening experience for some of us, particularly the first time—and that the scariest part might be not knowing who will initiate, as opposed to the actual sexual technique. At the same time, this experience is what can make sex between two gay people so wonderful.

25

"In what ways do gay men and lesbians experience discrimination?"

Gay men and lesbians face discrimination in their personal lives and in relating to the major social and economic institutions. Below is some background; in addition, it can help drive home the point to discuss your own personal experiences of discrimination.

***Civil and legal discrimination:** Currently, gay people do not have any of the civil rights guaranteed to other groups. Gay men and lesbians can be fired from their jobs without regard to job performance or seniority, and denied housing without legal recourse. An example of employment discrimination is a man who was terminated from his job after two and one-half years of exemplary service because a coworker informed the employer that he was gay. Lesbian mothers and gay fathers are subject to losing custody of their children without any discussion of who can provide the best parenting, but simply because they are gay. Immigration laws can be used to prevent known gay people from entering the United States. For example, a foreign person needing to attend the funeral of a family member could be denied entry if immigration became aware of the person's homosexuality. This law has also been used to prevent political activists from participating in international conferences. In general, it is legal to discriminate against gay people. This will continue until communities pass local ordinances which ban discrimination and society changes its negative attitudes toward lesbians and gay men.

In some states, sexual acts between two consenting men are felonies and can be punished with imprisonment or death. In most of the states where homosexual sex is outlawed, there are equally antiquated laws against heterosexual sex. In Washington, D. C., overriding the decisions of the District's government, Congress recently voted to retain the old ordinances. As a result, along with continuing to outlaw consenting homosexual sex, they have also outlawed any sexual acts between a man and a woman unless the couple is married and the sex act is done with the man on top of the woman. In states where the law gets involved with the morals of the community, everyone is affected by invasion of privacy, not just gay people.

***Police discrimination:** Because of the antihomosexual laws, gay people and those who are merely suspected of being gay or lesbian have long been targeted by the people for constant harassment. The police have raided gay and lesbian bars, beaten the occupants, and arrested thousands of people for "suspected homosexual activity." Even if the charges are never

processed, the public exposure of having been arrested for "homosexual activity" often can be enough to ruin a person's career, family life, or position in the community. Many people feel that the police would be better used fighting violent crime and protecting the larger community rather than hanging around lesbian and gay bars and harrasing adults whom they suspect of being gay or lesbian. Many gay people are reluctant to depend on the police in cases for which heterosexuals take police protection for granted (for example, breakins, muggings, thefts, and so on), for fear that the police might find out that they are gay or lesbian and then harrass them or ignore future calls for police assistance.

***Medical and mental health discrimination:** Although the psychiatric profession several years ago voted to remove homosexuality from its list of "mental illnesses," the mental health field has long been a primary abuser of gay people. In an attempt to change a person's sexual orientation, mental health professionals have tried hospitalization, electroshock therapy, medication, and years of psychoanalysis. That there has *never* been any success with these "treatments" has not thwarted their continued use. Although shock treatments are not so common these days, professionals continue to use a method called aversion therapy in which patients are encouraged to associate repulsive thoughts with homosexual feelings so that eventually they will be sickened by their own attractions. This is a method that is commonly used for ending smoking or specific phobias. Not only does it not work, but it assumes that gayness or lesbianism is *exclusively a behavior* which can be isolated and altered. Instead, a person's sexual orientation, which includes feelings of love, encompasses an entire way of understanding the world and cannot be eliminated without eliminating a person's psyche.

The medical profession sometimes discriminates against gay people by refusing to acknowledge their presence. By not promoting an attitude of acceptance, some hospitals often overlook medical issues that could be important. All the forms and methods of questioning a patient assume heterosexuality. Birth control is often pushed on "single" women and anal exams ignored for men. Examiners want to know if you are married or sexually active but do not ask if you are in a relationship or the nature of your sexual involvement. Many gay people avoid routine hospital visits because of fear of negative judgments. This can lead to infection and complications that could be avoided if medical facilities are more accepting.

Another way in which hospitals discriminate against gays and lesbians (as well as non-married heterosexual couples) is by denying visitation rights. A lesbian or gay lover is not considered "family" and would be unable to visit a critically ill partner. Nor would a gay person be notified as "next of kin" in the event of a serious injury or a death.

***Physical attacks:** Gay people (particularly men) are frequently targets of physical attacks by gangs of men. "Queer-bashing" has become a recognized sport for groups of teenagers who are interested in proving their manhood (an activity which is sometimes not discouraged by the police). At one college, part of the hazing process for a fraternity involved harrassing a gay person and passing out literature encouraging the killing of gay men and lesbians. Although the fraternity maintained that this was a joke, it perpetuated attitudes and actions that are already sanctioned by the state and could have resulted in the death of gay people. There is a myth that

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the gay and lesbian community is very dangerous because of the practices of gay men and lesbians. The reality is that the danger comes from outside of the community and is directed toward anyone who appears to be lesbian or gay.

***Attitudinal homophobia:** In acknowledging being lesbian or gay, many people experience the pain of losing the love and respect of people about whom we care. Some parents disown their children. Some have actually held funeral services for a child who has shared his/her gayness or lesbianism with them. We know of many people who lost close friends when they found out the person was lesbian or gay. Many gay people have had to leave their communities in order to find acceptance or even tolerance.

The process of discovering gay or lesbian feelings can be particularly difficult. Each person wonders "Am I the only one with these feelings?" In trying to understand lesbianism or gayness, we look for answers and models. There are few movies, television programs, books, or famous individuals or couples that act as sources of information or modeling. In the few places where we can locate references to homosexuality, most of the statements or images describe perverts or the mentally deranged.

The loneliness and isolation of first *coming out* can drive many gay people back into the closet--denying our experience and feeling ashamed of it. Some gay people who have openly declared and accepted their lifestyle, when confronted with the social and economic oppression of gays and lesbians, have been forced back into silence in order to find work to survive.

The social stigma and rejection attached to homosexuality have forced many gay people to hide their lesbianism or gayness. For some people, this means pretending to be single and having to deal with social situations where they are fixed up with a date or pitied for not being married. Some gay people who are in relationships lie and describe their lover as one of the opposite sex in order to share some part of their lives with straight friends or coworkers. Many others simply have to eliminate major portions of their lives (parties, political work, funerals, breakups, and the like) in their communications with others. An example of this is someone we know whose lover died after a 35-year relationship. He felt he could not openly grieve at work because he would have been fired if others knew he was gay.

Gay people have to struggle and seek out support within the gay and lesbian communities, and among those heterosexuals who are accepting, in order to weather the pain of being invisible or rejected. Only with the growth of a strong and visible lesbian and gay pride movement and changes in societal attitudes, which both recognize and affirm gayness, can gay men and lesbians along with heterosexuals learn to dispel the myths and prejudice that are so damaging.

26

"I have a friend who I think is lesbian. Should I come right out and ask?"

There are reasons why your friend has not told you that she is a lesbian. Perhaps she is not ready. Perhaps she is unsure of your reaction and does not want to risk getting hurt. Perhaps, not wanting to make lesbianism seem like a problem, she feels awkward in making an "announcement."

Some gay people are relieved to have someone ask directly, "Are you gay?" Others prefer to choose the time when they tell their friends.

Be supportive and make it clear you would be receptive to the information that your friend is lesbian. By doing so, you minimize for your friend the risk of coming out.

27

"Are all lesbians feminists and vice versa?"

A person's sexual orientation does not inherently predict her political outlook. Before the current women's movement, many lesbians came out and loved women without attributing any political significance to the act. Still today many lesbians do not actively identify with feminism. On the other hand, many women also "acknowledge" or "discover" lesbianism through their participation in feminist activity. Many of us read about lesbianism for the first time in a political context and received support from feminist friends to see lesbianism as a positive option.

Try to find out what the questioner is asking in this question. Many times the questioner is a heterosexual feminist who has felt judged by lesbian friends for not being a lesbian. Someone once said "Feminism is the theory; lesbianism is the practice." Some feminists felt pressured to "explore" lesbianism because of political pressure. Some recipients of this "exploration" felt used and angry. If it is appropriate, you might also share some of the antilesbian history of the women's movement, when straight feminists sought to disassociate the movement from lesbianism because of social homophobia.

The relationship between lesbianism and feminism has been very complex. For some people, especially activists and theorists, they are mutually complementary and connected; for others the two are two separate relatives.

28

"I've never met a gay person before."

You might not have met a person who told you directly that he/she is gay or lesbian, but you have certainly met gay people before. It is helpful to point out here that gay and lesbian "invisibility" is a problem because it strengthens the already prevalent heterosexual bias in the culture. Many people do not consider the possibility that someone they love is gay or lesbian because they *presume* everyone is straight.

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Additional questions:

29 Why do some lesbians, gays, and bisexuals use the term "queer"?

One misconception is that the word "queer" is embraced by all gay people. It is true that many have chosen to reclaim this once derogatory label for all lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals, while some use the word to designate only those in the community who are political activists. However, there are other gay people who dislike the label and resent its use. This is just one more example of the diversity present. Why do gay people want special rights?

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30 As a straight person, what can I do to help the lesbian, gay, bisexual movement?

31 Aren't you scared of getting AIDS?

32 You say that the stereotypes about gays aren't true, yet most of the gays I've known and at least two of you on the panel appear stereotypically gay or lesbian. What gives?

33 How do you feel about "outing" someone?