

Pink Triangles

A Study Guide

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PART I : About the Film

Pink Triangles is a 35 minute documentary designed to explore prejudice against lesbians and gay men. The purpose of the film is to document "homophobia" (the fear and hatred of homosexuality) and show some of its roots and current manifestations. The film offers some discussion about why this prejudice is so strong, and makes connections with other forms of oppression (i.e. towards women, Black people, radicals and Jews). We hope the film will enable audiences to learn about the realities of how gay men and lesbians experience oppression and enable viewers to move beyond their own stereotypes and lack of information.

Pink Triangles is composed of many interviews with people who have first hand knowledge of discrimination. Mental health workers and hospital personnel discuss the attitudes of the "helping" professions toward homosexuality. Students in high school groups express their prejudices towards gay people and demonstrate their ability to understand and support gay issues. A parent of a lesbian explores the process of coming to terms with her daughter's choice, and other gay people discuss the mixed reactions from their families. Black, Latino and Asian lesbians and gay men analyze their communities and the connections between racism and homophobia.

The film also provides a historical perspective. Medieval and early modern history documents the fact that gay men and lesbians were burned at the stake. (The word *faggot* which means a bundle of kindling became an epithet for a gay man because gay men were used as human torches to burn "witches" in the Middle Ages.) Old film footage of the allies liberating the concentration camp accompanies an interview with Professor Richard Plant, the foremost researcher on gay life in Nazi Germany. Plant outlines the persecution of gay men in the camps and describes it as "dress rehearsal" for the mass executions of the Jews. Subsequent footage alludes to the later witch hunt of gay men and lesbians during the McCarthy period in the United States.

The film also attempts to link past discrimination with present and future possibilities, indicating how society acts out its own contradictions and tensions by making scapegoats of groups who are not mainstream. The film exposes through television interviews and paid political announcements the "Moral Majority" message about homosexuality. The group symbolizes the conscious organization of prejudice and the dissemination of misinformation about gay men and lesbians. People on the street articulate more common feelings about gayness. Their comments serve to answer important questions and stereotypes about the issue. In looking to the future, the film raises the specter of social and economic conditions which could recreate in the United States

a Nazi like oppression of any one who is not a part of the mainstream -radicals, non-white people, Jews and gays. Only by working towards a society which acknowledges difference and affirms it can any of us hope to survive.

Pink Triangles was made by a collective of 9 people -women and men, gay and straight. We spent a year together in weekly meetings to plan the film, review the footage as we made it and hammer out a common vision. Two members of the group were experienced film makers who taught the rest of us the technical aspects of film making and the special language of film. We shared editing responsibilities and made all graphic design decisions as a group. We went on interviews in small groups and reviewed each segment at a collective meeting. We had never worked together as a group before but we shared common political experiences and a commitment to collectivity.

We have written this study guide as a way to make the film more useful in the classroom and discussion groups. We have expanded on many of the concepts in the film and provided a consolidated overview of some common misconceptions about homosexuality.

DEFINITION OF THE PINK TRIANGLE

In the Nazi concentration camps, prisoners were classified by patches of different colors which corresponded to their "crime." Jews wore a yellow star (two yellow triangle together), political prisoners (liberals, socialists, communists) a red triangle, anti-socials (drunks, vagrants, etc.) a black triangle, hard-core criminals a green triangle and Jehovah's Witnesses a purple triangle. A pink triangle was assigned to gay men. Estimates vary, but a conservative estimate suggests that tens of thousands of gay men were imprisoned in the concentration camps for being homosexual. Gay men and supporters of gay politics were rounded up, questioned and forced to give names of friends and supporters. With each police interrogation, more names and address books were confiscated, and thousands more gay people and their friends were brought in for questioning and threatened with exposure, jail, and later the camps. Many gay men (and those who were suspected of being gay) who were not sent to the camps were fired from their jobs, seen as a disgrace to their families and socially ostracized as a result of the police harassment.

Heinrich Himmler, chief of the Gestapo, and the Nazi state targeted homosexuals for persecution along with other groups. According to the historian Richard Plant, Himmler hated women and he thought that homosexuals were like women. Himmler felt that the homosexual was unable to fight and would disgrace the German state. his policy of the annihilation of gay men followed from his thinking that homosexuals were inferior (like females) and would contaminate and demoralize others.

It appears that lesbians were not persecuted in the same way. Himmler and the Nazi leadership did not think that women were capable of having a sexual identity independent of marriage and child bearing. Himmler developed the concept of a National Sexual Budget which prescribed the appropriate sexual roles and tasks for women. Aryan women were expected to breed blonde-haired, blue eyed children for the new Germany. For them, abortion and birth control were illegal and child production with and appropriately suggested male a duty. Non-Aryan women were encouraged to abort rather than produce "inferior" children. Sexual contact between Jews and non-Jews was forbidden. Himmler believed that if a woman had sex with a Jew (or a homosexual) and later had children, the children would carry the "contamination" of the first

sexual encounter (even if that person was not the father). Lesbians were not recognized as existing by the state. Instead they were persecuted as Jews, radicals and women who would not follow the prescribed roles laid out by the German government.

Although the pink triangle was not worn by lesbians, it has become a symbol for all gay people of the extremist form of oppression which has befallen the community. The pink triangle has also come to symbolize all ways in which gay men and lesbians suffered and continue to suffer victimization for being gay. Gay men, lesbians and the supporters of liberation wear the triangle to signify the horror of the Nazi movement and their intention not to let it be repeated.

PART II: Working With Your Audience

Many people find discussions about homosexuality difficult and uncomfortable. Because the film focuses on various forms of prejudice against lesbians and gay men, we expect that many people who watch it will react with their own deep personal feelings -these emotions are an important part of any screening of *Pink Triangles*. Emotions may range from hostility and guilt to identification or complete denial. A meaningful discussion can grow out of these responses if the group leader provides a structured and supportive environment for sharing feelings and ideas.

FACTORS TO CONSIDER ABOUT THE AUDIENCE

Sexuality. Although there are probably some gay men and lesbians in the audience, don't expect them to "come out" in the course of the discussion. Sharing confidences about sexuality and sexual preference makes gay people more vulnerable than others because of the potential consequences. Although some men and women may want to share this information, you as the leader should not solicit it. If you push the issue you could contribute to the feelings of isolation and oppression by forcing a gay person to be open about his/her personal life.

Parents and Children. Many people feel that discussions about sex and relationships with their families present are more difficult than any others. As a group leader you need to be sensitive to this, perhaps by raising issues about parental expectations, sex role stereotypes, the importance of family ties, etc. You may also want to break up the group into more comfortable subgroups if discussion is stilted.

Bosses and workers. No matter how well people seem to get along, relationships between bosses and workers are obviously affected by the economic power of one over the other. Gay people realistically fear job related reprisals from bosses and/or co-workers. These could take the form of poor work evaluations, sexual harassment or sabotage of work projects as well as firing. Since social relationships are an important part of the work environment, gay men and lesbians often choose to keep their personal lives private, fearing ostracism by their co-workers. It is important to discuss these ideas and to give people an opportunity to see the risks involved in being "out" at work.

Nationality. There are scenes of Nazi concentration camps in the film which could stir painful memories for people in the audience. Consider beforehand who might be affected and prepare some questions which will allow people to react to the scenes without feeling isolated or

embarrassed. It might be helpful to stress the connection between the annihilation of the Jews by the Nazis and the attempts to exterminate other nationalities.

Class. There are many contradictory stereotypes which are promulgated about gay people in relation to class. One is that all gay people are upper class. Some groups feel that homosexuality is a product of decadent, bourgeoisie culture which could be eliminated if the culture were changed. Other people feel that there is a connection in mannerisms and style between gay men and aristocrats perhaps from the tradition of visibly gay men in English ruling class culture or among the European artistic community. The opposite opinion is also believed. Many people think that all gay people are working class. There are many stereotypes (both of class and gayness) of "tough" lesbians and gay men who are involved with cruising and the gay bar scene. Neither stereotype is true, because gay men and lesbians come from all backgrounds. Yet it is often the case that no class wants to affirm its gay population.

Gay men and lesbians from different class backgrounds are affected differently. Working class gays are put down by society and often by wealthier gays for being working class as well as rejected in their own neighborhoods for being gay. Some wealthier gays (particularly men) have privileges of financial security to fall back on if they are victimized for being gay. There are also some professional opportunities which are more tolerant of gay workers.

In dealing with your audience, you may want to discuss the ways in which people from different class backgrounds see gayness, how discrimination towards working class people and homophobia are similar and different, and how working class gays are doubly oppressed.

Race. It is important to realize that people of color in your group already have a special understanding of prejudice based on their experience with the racism of our society. Although gay men and lesbians are represented in every racial group, their experiences as gays are affected by their background. Asian gay men and lesbians face an invisibility within the Asian communities. As the film shows, there is not even a word in Chinese for homosexual. Black men and women face hostility from the Black community. Homosexuality is often seen as a "white disease" which is a threat to a unified black community. In Latino communities in which sex roles are very distinctive, gay men and lesbians face open repression for not fitting their prescribed social roles.

In addition to the prejudice that gay people of color experience within their communities of birth, they face additional discrimination based on color from both the white lesbian and gay communities and larger white society. Gay people of color may find themselves rejected by the communities they grew up in for being gay only to also be rejected by the gay community for their color.

Gender. Men and women will often respond differently to the issue of gayness. Many women who have been affected by the freedoms of the Women's Liberation movement are already able to support gay people. They feel that there are connections between their own struggles for new roles, full participation in society and equality and the freedoms which accompany gay liberation. There are other women who feel threatened by gayness, who worry that the opening up of new roles and models for women's behavior will cause disruption and confusion in their lives.

Although there are some heterosexual men who feel they could benefit from gay liberation, many men are very threatened by homosexuality. In past experiences, of the Gay Speaker's Bureau, men in the audiences have been the angriest and most antagonistic and often walked out. Some men are afraid of their own gay feelings and find it necessary to attack other gay people. Other men are uncomfortable with their perception that gay men are giving up masculine power and acting like women. For heterosexual men who accept the cultural norm of male dominance, this is very disconcerting. Some men express a fear of being approached sexually by a gay man. (In a group it is useful to make an analogy to women being approached by men and how they handle the situation.)

Within the gay community, lesbians and gay men experience their gayness quite differently. Lesbians are shaped as much by their womanhood as by their lesbianism. They are subject to all the same conditionings as their heterosexual sisters. They also share the same struggles and joys of being a woman. Because they are men, some male heterosexuals want to maintain their privileges as males which includes having more opportunities than women, but others have come to understand the concept of oppression because of their own and learned to support feminism and their lesbian sisters.

DEFINITIONS

Some terms and expressions in the film may be new to your audience. These include:

"gay" - a common and acceptable word for homosexual

"faggot" - a slang term for a gay man.

"dyke" - a slang word for a lesbian.

"queer" - a pejorative term for a gay person.

"queer baiting" - harassing someone who is suspected of being gay by name calling.

"queer bashing" - the actual physical assault of people who are seen to be gay. "Queer bashing has become an actual "sport" for gangs.

"homophobia" - the fear and hatred of homosexuality.

"coming out" - the process by which gay men and lesbians recognize and acknowledge their gayness.

"straight" - heterosexual

DISCUSSION TECHNIQUES

In order to promote discussion about homosexuality, you may need to use specific exercises. While it could be useful with certain audiences to open for questions and comments, many groups will not feel comfortable speaking out on any topic. Most individuals feel self-conscious speaking out on any topic. This is accentuated when the topic is homosexuality. Most people have been brought up with very negative images of gay men and lesbians. It is important for the facilitator to validate the audience's discomfort and encourage discussion as a vehicle for understanding and change.

The techniques included in this guide are distilled from the experiences of Gay Speaker's Bureaus and other groups who have facilitated awareness workshops. We hope that you will consider doing an entire unit on homosexuality and have included enough exercises for several classes. The film is certain to raise a lot of important and new questions for any group, and it may be useful to allow more than one time for discussion.

As the organizer for the group, you may want to familiarize yourself with some of the common myths and facts included in this guide. Allow yourself to identify your own feelings and attitudes about homosexuality: which aspects are most disquieting for you, what feelings you have for the same sex and opposite sex, what messages or images you received growing up about "queers", who you know that is gay/lesbian and how you feel about sponsoring a program on homosexuality and risking being suspected of being gay yourself. In presenting this film, you can anticipate that your audience may suspect or ask if you are gay. One way to respond is to ask the questioner whether it would make a difference and engage in dialogue. You can also point out that saying yes could result in your being fired or subjected to some of the discrimination discussed in the film. If you simply say no, then you separate yourself from gay people who would wither be forced to lie or expose themselves to this prejudice.

1. Desensitization Exercise

On the blackboard write the two headings "Male homosexual" and "Female homosexual", leaving room under each of lots of entries. Ask the group to call out slang terms for each heading and to indicate under which heading you are to write it. This technique is particularly useful for groups which may be hesitant to talk open and honestly. You might want to purchase the book *The Queers Vernacular* to acquaint yourself with the origins of some of the words.

2. Card Techniques for Soliciting Questions

Hand out index cards or slips of paper to each person. Ask them to write three questions about homosexuality and pass them in. You select each card and read out the question. Before supplying the answer, ask the audience what they think. If the question reflects a stereotype, ask where the stereotype comes from and who in society benefits from perpetuating it. This technique is particularly helpful if members of the group are having trouble participating.

3. Gay Speaker's Bureau presentation

Invite some lesbians and gay men to attend the group to share their experiences. In many areas, there are established Bureaus or Gay and Lesbian organizations that will send individuals who are prepared to speak about their experience. If you don't know of any groups, there is a publication called the Gay Yellow Pages which might be helpful. To have people in the group who are "out" forces an audience to confront in a concrete way some of their own myths. The audience has the opportunity to see that gay men and lesbians do not resemble the images of abnormality they may have grown up with. For many people it will be the first time they have met someone whom they know to be gay. After presentations of speaker's bureaus across the country, people in the audience have come up and made statements that, " they always hated gay people but they like the speakers," or " they also thought a gay person looked a certain way but seeing the speakers they had to change their impressions". Facing people who are proud of their

gayness and willing to answer questions about it challenges many of the ideas and assumptions that we have of gay men and lesbians.

4. Role Playing

Design certain situations and have members of the group act them out. (1) To get at stereotypes, you could have some one act out being gay. (2) To experience some of the pain of being gay, you could have one person enact coming out to her/his parents and how the parents would respond, or a situation where a gay person comes out to a straight friend. (3) To get a discrimination (particularly with teenagers who would be less willing to act out being gay), you could assign a situation in which some one is being harassed because their sister (parent, friend) is gay.

5. "One in Ten"

Ask the people in the group to count off by 10. Point out that statistically one person in 10 is gay (Kinsey studies).

6. Analogies with Other Groups

Within the film, there are a lot of connections made to the treatment of other groups who have been the targets of prejudice. Have people brainstorm what it means to be different or on the outside (e.g. Black, Jewish, physically disabled, left handed etc.). The analogy between left handed and gay people is a possible one (7/8 of the population is right handed; as recently as 50 years ago a child's left hand was tied behind the back to encourage right handedness; the Bible has condemnation against left-handed people; derivation of the word "sinister" comes from left-handed).

7. Guided Fantasy

The leader asks the group to relax and close their eyes and leads them through a description of a scenario in which the whole world is homosexual. First, ask the group to do some deep breathing, focusing on relaxation and slow inhalations. Then describe a day in which the person operates in a gay world including advertising, television shows, the work environment, parents who are staunch defenders of the "gay status quo", friends who make heterosexual jokes, etc. Try to elicit the feelings of loneliness and isolation that accompany being the only heterosexual in an environment that views heterosexuality as depraved, where you can't teach because of the possibility of seducing a member of the opposite sex, etc. and you must hide your secret for fear or disapproval. The only contacts which seem friendly are with other heterosexuals, if there are any.

Finish the exercise with breathing. Ask people what they experienced and whether they learned anything new.

8. Discrimination Brainstorm

Brainstorm examples of discrimination against lesbians and gay men. You may want to develop a case study (e.g., in housing, child custody, the military, employment, etc.).

9. Questionnaire

Develop and distribute a questionnaire of true/false statements about gay people. Have the group fill out the answers individually, then tabulate the responses. Discuss each statement trying to see why people believe the answers they put. (Possible statements include: " You can always tell a homosexual", "It would be upsetting for me to be in the same room with a gay person", "All gay men try to recruit young boys", "Lesbians hate men" "Gay men would rather be women" " You can catch homosexuality, it is a disease", "There are no Black/Latino gays" " I don't know any gay people" etc.)

10. Pictures

Develop a series of photographs of lots of different people, some of whom are gay. Pass around each photograph and ask the group if the person is gay/lesbian and why or why not. This is a very concrete way to get at stereotypes. It is also a useful way to show groups the existence of the differences among gay men and lesbians without having direct access to live people. (One place to get pictures of gay people is the local gay newspaper, but be sure you are not exposing someone without their knowledge.)

PART 3, MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT LESBIANS AND GAY MEN

What is a homosexual?

A homosexual is a person who is emotionally and/or sexually attracted or committed to a member or members of the same sex.

What causes homosexuality?

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 whether sexuality results from genetic make-up or environmental factors or a person's family upbringing. Considering that gay people and heterosexual people cross all sociological, psychological and economic definitions, one can only assume that both are normal and the result of many different factors.

How prevalent is homosexuality?

Alfred Kinsey, in his study of human sexuality published in 1947, estimated that about 13% of the male population and 7% of the female population are exclusively gay or lesbian. 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 19th 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 come in all colors, come from every religious background and represent all economic classes. There are active groups for gay Catholics, Protestants and Jews as well as atheists. Gay people have formed organization such as gay youth, disabled gays, Asian lesbians,

gay parents and the like. Gay men and lesbians live in the cities, the suburbs and in the country. Some of them are your teachers, your parents, your children and your friends. Everyone knows someone who is gay whether they are aware of it or not.

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 evidences 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. It prohibits eating shrimp and shellfish, the use of face paint and establishes many archaic dress and grooming codes. There are many rules within the Bible which are no longer taken literally.

Many of the Biblical texts which have been used to bolster anti-gay literature are misreadings of the Bible. In fact homosexuality is treated less seriously than the 7 deadly sins, but laziness, greed, and gluttony have not been grounds for castration, burning or drowning. Some commonly cited texts (Leviticus 18:12, Genesis 9,1 Corinthians 6:9,1 Timothy 1:10) used to support anti-gay attitudes were actually intended to condemn sex outside of marriage, male prostitution, and marrying/loving someone from a different race or country and not homosexuality per se. Rather than the Bible, it was later theologians spurred on by extra-religious concerns and cultural prejudices who sought to make much of the relatively little anti-gay 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" (Boswell, John, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality*).

Is homosexuality a mental illness?

Most psychiatrists agree that the critical test of mental health and emotional stability is whether an individual is able to maintain a more or less smoothly functioning life. An overwhelming body of evidence indicates that by this criterion, sexual orientation in itself does not determine the quality of mental health. Tests on gay men and lesbians and on heterosexuals have been unable to distinguish between groups in terms of functionality, stability and creativity.

The American Psychiatric Association in 1973 voted to remove homosexuality from its list of mental disorders because there was no indication that emotional distress or social impairment - the definition of mental disorder - were elements of homosexuality.

Any psychological problem which may arise is more likely to be associated with the loneliness and feelings of guilt brought on by social pressures and the internalization of homophobia. In fact most active lesbians and gay men lead healthy, productive lives.

Is homosexuality natural?

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, socio-economic 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% "homosexuality is considered normal and socially acceptable". There are also cultures where the definition of what it means to be a 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 for 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 another person of the same sex and membership in a community. For the estimated 22 million lesbians and gay men in the United States, homosexuality is a normal and satisfying way of life.

Do gay men and lesbians form relationships?

"A major new study on homosexuality concludes that many homosexual men and women lead stable lives without frenetic sexual activity and that some are considerably happier and better adjusted than heterosexuals as a whole" (New York Times, 7/9/78). This study (Bell Institute for Sex Research) goes on to say that due to the negative pressure of society, some gay men and lesbians feel less self-accepting. Gay people do not have social, religious, or legal structures to support couples staying together. Relationships are not openly validated nor are there external constraints (joint property, etc.) to keep a relationship connected. On the other hand, lesbian and gay relationships reflect an equality and chance for creating mutually satisfying models that are not distinguished in heterosexual couples. The set of prescribed roles for heterosexual men and women often contributes to conflict in straight relationships and enormous strain particularly for heterosexual women who do not want to live out a traditionally passive complement to their male spouse.

External forces tend to support the break-up of gay relationships. These are counteracted to a certain extent by pressure from within the community for stability and continuity. Statistically one study shows that approximately 60% of lesbians and 40% of gay men are involved in long term committed relationships. 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 but are not interested in being in a sexual involvement with another person.

Are gay men and women into "roles"?

Before the new wave of the Women's and Gay liberation movements in the 1960's 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 concerning 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 may have appeared to play the "butch" or male role and the other played the "femme" or feminine role.

A significant aspect of the gay experience is that there are less 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 which are

expected and those which are discouraged. From here, girls and boys learn how to relate to each other and form intimate relationships which reflect these different sex role orientations.

Since the 1960's with the advent of Women's liberation and Gay 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, uncomfortable and impractical dress, limited job opportunities and the like. Women have also asked men to change and begin to relinquish the strictly masculine role which 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 relationships - man loving man, woman loving woman - challenges the old structures and provides impetus for change. Lesbians don't have a man to support them or take care of them. Out of survival, they widen their own experiences and develop their potential, for example learning to do the kinds of home and auto repairs that most boys learn 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 or take care of their emotional needs. Gay men have to learn how to find these resources internally. Because of these direct experiences, gay men and lesbians are appropriate role models for those people seeking to break out of the traditional sex role patterns and often lead the movement for human liberation.

Do homosexuals molest children?

A survey of convictions for sex offenses involving juveniles in New Jersey (Ravich and Weiss, 1962) revealed that more than 4/5 of these cases involved male contact 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. Child molesting, in addition seems to be a male activity; women almost never molest children sexually and this is also true of lesbians. Among men, child molesting is as rare among homosexuals as it is among heterosexuals, maybe more so because a homosexual molester would far more likely to be arrested than his heterosexual counterpart. The Gay Teacher's Caucus of New York has been informed by the Board of Education 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 students of the same sex.

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

Can you always tell a homosexual?

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. This is particularly true with respect to transvestites. The vast majority of men who wear

women's clothing define themselves as heterosexual. It is perhaps more obvious that the vast majority of women who wear "men's" clothing are not making a statement about their sexuality.

The stereotypes of the swishy faggot or the motorcycle dyke are just stereotypes. 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 every effeminate mannerisms who appear to be mimicking women. Society seems to focus on these parts of the gay community as representatives of all gay people. Although this is not true, these people 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 role. 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 "bulldikes". The reality is that if the freedom of expression which these people represented was acceptable, all of us gay and straight, would benefit.

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 ideas and images of what is "feminine" and what is "masculine". Men are expected to be strong, athletic, and emotionally reserved; whereas, 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 gayness is a celebration and affirmation of your gender and not a rejection of it.

Some people confuse transsexualism with homosexuality. A transsexual is a person who has an operation to become to opposite sex. These people, (very few of whom are gay), feel very deeply that they were born into the wrong body and should be the other gender. For them the physical operation brings their bodies into harmony with their internal identities and sexual orientation. While a gay person growing up may feel different and even uncomfortable with his/her sex role, this has more to do with cultural constraints, parental expectations and homophobia than a desire to change gender.

Do gay people make good parents?

This is a question which is consistently raised in court whenever a lesbian mother or gay father is being threatened with loss of custody or child visitation rights because of the parent's sexuality. It seems to be difficult enough for society to recognize the existence of gays as parents (either as a result of previous heterosexual relationships or getting pregnant as an openly gay person) let alone to sanction that reality.

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

Some people feel that a lesbian mother or a gay father would be less capable of providing a loving, nurturing environment for a child. There is absolutely no evidence that a person's sexuality has any bearing on their capacity to be loving, responsible and dependable as parents. Our experience in making the film has, if anything, indicated the opposite. Dr. Judd Marmor, past president of the American Psychiatric Association, states that " 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 may be subjected to the prejudice and ridicule which is directed toward their parents. But the answer is to attack the discrimination not the parents or the children.

How do parents respond to having a child who is gay?

Parental response to gay children differs depending upon the relationship with the child and the investment the parents have in their child's future. Some parents are very angry, hurt or disappointed. Some are more accepting but confused. Usually these reactions are a result of not understanding what it means to be gay. Society has created many myths for "making their child that way". Although the truth is that parents do not determine their children's sexuality, parents still feel guilty.

In our everyday experience, the only form of relationship which is sanctioned is the traditional heterosexual, nuclear family model. Homosexuality is portrayed as a sickness, or 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. 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 gayness which are happy, healthy and productive.

It is also important to understand why a child might choose to "come out" to his/her parents. Many people feel that the child is throwing something in their face or trying to be hurtful. Often, it is an expression of honesty and openness- an attempt by the children to include the parent in their life not a means 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 life (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 in taking the risk to be open with a parent can a child begin to have a relationship which has some meaning for both sides. Parents need to try to be understanding of their child without pretending that the new information isn't difficult for them. It seems that is its a long process of talking with caring and honesty which allows for a relationship to be rebuilt for parents and children.

Is old age more difficult for lesbians and gay men?

There is a stereotype that an aging homosexual is destined for unhappiness and loneliness. This is based on several assumptions about gay men and old people: that gay men are only attracted to each other sexually (and that older people lose their sexual ability), that gay men do not form lasting relationships and that the heterosexual experience of aging is more desirable. None of these 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, one partner has frequently died, or the marriage has ended in divorce leaving many older people to live their lives alone.

The older gay person shares in these difficulties which accompany aging in our society. The gay 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 which are more stable than the heterosexual counterpart of marriage. Many gay "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 also some problems that affect gay older people more than the heterosexual elderly. Because there is no legal validation of homosexual relationships, when a partner dies, the other is often left without any access to benefits from inheritance, insurance or property which had been previously shared. Relatives of the deceased can have wills contested. There is no legal protection for any gay person that their wishes will be protected after death. There have also been examples where the surviving partner of a relationship has been barred from the funeral because the relatives would not acknowledge the relationship.

CONCLUSION

Many of the prejudices against gay people are based on inaccurate stereotypes and lack of information. Our society portrays gay men and lesbians as ill, perverted, or non-existent. Many people are not aware that they know healthy individuals who are gay. For other people who fear the possibility of their own potential homosexuality, gayness is a scary issue which they would prefer to attack rather than understand. Unlike a person's gender or race any one could be gay.

Many people also link homosexuality with sex. In a culture which has a great deal of difficulty expressing openness about any kind of sex, homosexuality is even more troublesome. The sex aspect of homosexuality is often accentuated over the emotional and community attachments of the gay lifestyle. Our society stressed through its images and models one way to be (the traditional male/female roles within a nuclear family). The concept of same sex relationships challenges this model and suggests that people could lead lives without fitting the set patterns. Particularly, for people who feel uncomfortable with their own sexuality or relationships, this can be very unsettling and threatening.

In society the presence of groups of people who are different from the status quo can be seen as very threatening. As the film illustrates, particularly in times when a society experiences dislocation and crisis, racial, ethnic and political minorities and other critical groups are the targets for scapegoating and attack. Rather than admit confusion or make changes, a society often chooses to try to shift the focus from its own failings.

By perceiving the connections between the treatment of gay people and other oppressed groups comes the possibility for a shared movement to change all the oppressions. It is important to view the discrimination against gay men and lesbians as stemming from many of the same sources as the victimization of Blacks, Jews, radicals, and the like. From this perspective, it becomes in the self-interest of many heterosexuals to support gay liberation. Through challenging the attacks on gays, people are not only fighting the immorality of prejudice but also striving for a society which is more accepting of the differences in all of us.

PART IV

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