

## MYTH/INFORMATION GAME

### 1. Homosexual behavior is unnatural.

**MYTH.** Anthropologists Ford and Beach found that homosexual behavior is present in every species of mammal that has been carefully studied. Since human beings in all cultures, animals, and insects engage in sexual behavior with the same gender frequently and in significant numbers, it cannot be considered unnatural.

### 2. Gay and lesbian people can be easily identified by the way they look and act.

**MYTH.** While some gay people do fit stereotypes, most do not. There is no way to know for sure if someone is gay unless he or she tells you. For example, heterosexual guys who have characteristics that some people regard as effeminate are often labeled as gay. The way a person carries himself or herself is not what makes a person gay. What makes a person gay is the strong internal feelings of romantic and sexual attraction to members of the same sex.

### 3. People choose their sexual orientation.

**MYTH.** People do not choose to whom they are attracted. Feelings of attraction are discovered rather than chosen. Most experts today believe that sexual orientation is determined early in life and influenced greatly by biological factors.

### 4. Parents are the major influence on whether their child is straight or gay.

**MYTH.** Heterosexual, gay, lesbian, and bisexual children are raised in all kinds of families. Studies have been unable to show that any particular style of parenting leads a child to be gay or straight or that the sexual orientation of the parent is a factor. More than 90 percent of the children who live with a gay parent have a heterosexual orientation. Likewise, the vast majority of gay people have been raised by heterosexual parents who wanted and expected their children to be heterosexual. The fact is, children seem to develop their sexual orientation independently of their parents.

### 5. Gay people can become heterosexual if they really want to and work hard at it.

**MYTH.** Although many attempts have been made, efforts to change the orientation of gay and lesbian people have failed overwhelmingly. People who view homosexuality as an illness have sought so-called cures, but there is no cure because being gay is not an illness. Gay people have been able to change their sexual behavior but not their sexual orientation. This means that the gay men and lesbians who behave heterosexually are acting in deep contradiction to their innermost feelings, a practice that usually leads to psychological turmoil and pain.

### 6. Lesbians are at much lower risk of getting STDs than gay men or straight women and men.

**FACT.** Lesbians are typically at very low risk for all sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS. This is largely true because lesbians tend to be more monogamous than heterosexual couples and gay men. Also, lesbians do not engage in high risk behaviors, such as penis-vagina intercourse or anal sex. Of course, other STDs can be transmitted through oral sex if one partner has a disease, and if lesbian women engage in heterosexual intercourse or other high-risk behaviors, they are as vulnerable to

infection as anyone else. However, compared with other groups, lesbian women have very low rates of STDs.

**7. Most lesbians want to be men and gay men want to be women.**

**MYTH.** Lesbians are biological women who see themselves as women who are romantically and sexually attracted to other women. Gay men think of themselves as men loving men. People who are born one sex but feel psychologically that they are actually the other sex are called transsexuals.

**8. If you've had a pleasurable sexual experience with someone of the same gender, that means you're gay.**

**MYTH.** The question often arises, "How do I know if I'm gay?" Sexual orientation has nothing to do with wanting to be the other gender. It is also not the result of having one positive experience with the same gender. It is very possible for someone with a heterosexual orientation to enjoy a sexual experience with someone of the same gender, often by fantasizing about a heterosexual partner. A person is gay if his or her primary feelings of romantic and sexual attraction are for members of the same gender. Sexual orientation is all about feelings. It is important to note that some people who have these feelings choose not to act on their feelings and may not call themselves gay or lesbian.

**9. Gay people generally become aware of their feelings when they are teenagers or even younger.**

**FACT.** Most gay people say that they knew that they were "different" at an early age. They knew that they had special feelings for specific members of their same gender, that their crushes were homosexual and that they could not relate to the excitement surrounding heterosexual relationships in society.

**10. There is no such thing as a true bisexual. Bisexuals are generally confused about their sexuality or they are exploring.**

**MYTH.** Bisexuality is a legitimate sexual orientation. Some people have the potential to achieve sexual and emotional satisfaction and fulfillment with members of both sexes. Bisexuality is a lifelong orientation, although relating sexually to both sexes may be limited to a particular period in a bisexual person's life. Some experts believe that the majority of human beings are bisexual. However, many people never tune into the homosexual side of their attractions. Some people have bisexual feelings but do not identify themselves as bisexual. Bisexuals tell us that they feel like they are in two closets because they are often not accepted in either the gay or straight community.

**11. The United States Constitution protects a gay person from being fired or denied housing solely on the basis of his or her sexual orientation.**

**MYTH.** The United States Constitution provides no civil rights protection on the basis of sexual orientation. In other words, there is no national law that prevents employers, landlords, or service providers from discriminating against someone because she or he is gay. However, as of 1999, there are specific nondiscrimination laws in ten states (California, Connecticut, Hawaii, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Wisconsin.) In all other states, discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is legal. In Canada, however, a federal antidiscrimination law includes

sexual orientation in the categories named in the Human Rights Code. Provincial school boards also have antiviolence codes that define violence to include harassment due to sexual orientation.

**12. The majority of people in the world with AIDS are heterosexual.**

**FACT.** As of 1998, this is not yet true in the United States, but the trend is headed in that direction. The largest increase in rates of HTV infection in the United States are among heterosexual women and teenagers. In Canada, the largest increase in rates of HIV infection are among teenagers, young adult women, and IV drug users.

**13. The majority of child molesters are heterosexual.**

**FACT.** Over 90 percent of reported child molestations involve adult heterosexual men and young girls. The adult is usually someone the child knows and trusts, often a member of the family.

**14. In a lesbian or gay relationship, one partner plays the male ("butch") role and the other plays the female ("femme") role.**

**MYTH.** In most same-gender relationships, the partners do not play roles. They do not try to mimic heterosexual relationships. One person is typically more outgoing than the other. Either person is likely to initiate sexual activity, although as in any relationship, one person may be more interested than the other. Even in heterosexual relationships, couples are getting away from playing rigid roles based on gender.

**15. Gay and lesbian relationships seldom last.**

**MYTH.** Gay and lesbian people, like straight people, have many different kinds of relationships. Some last and some don't. The myth is that it is rare to see long-term relationships among gay or lesbian couples. There are, however, gay couples who have been together for 20, 30, and 40 years, and longer. Among heterosexual married couples in the United States and Canada, almost 50 percent end in divorce. Relationships don't always last among heterosexual or gay couples.

**16. Gay people can't have children.**

**MYTH.** Gay men and lesbian women are very capable of having children, although not as a result of having sex with their same-gender partner. Many gay people are parents as a result of an earlier heterosexual relationship or marriage. Some lesbian women choose to become artificially inseminated or to become pregnant by a male friend (sometimes a gay man who also wants to be a parent). Other gay people adopt children or raise a child who needs a home. Parenting is a very important life experience for many gay men and lesbian women.