

Just out

"Oh lord, please don't let me be misunderstood"

A gay youth debunks a number of myths about homosexuality

BY RICH O'DONNELL

I am always surprised when I discover examples of the multitude of myths about homosexuality that abound in our society. The myths range from "humorous" misconceptions to misinformed paranoia which is damaging to the minds of lesbians and gays coming to terms with their feelings. Indeed, I should not really make light of any such myths, because by creating false beliefs about homosexuality and homosexuals, they damage us all. Below are four myths and my answers to them. I am sure any reader could name dozens more.

Myth No. 1: Sex, Sex, Sex!

First on my list of erroneous ideas about homosexuality is the belief that all the gay and lesbian world consists of is sex, sex, sex, and, yes, more sex.

My Answer:

Oh, really! Ask any gay or lesbian couple and they will tell you that their relationship does not consist solely of sex — there are too many hours in a day to make it physically possible. As in a heterosexual relationship, sex for homosexuals can be purely physical but also, quite often, it is an intimate expression of those uncounted hearts and minds. Moreover, I hope that friendship is based upon qualities like affection, trust and caring rather than on gender or sexuality. This negative point of view is one I remember only too well from my days in the closet: same-sex feelings are purely physical and therefore bad; even if they're fulfilled, they'll never lead to the kind of long-lasting love that straight people have, because only heterosexual feelings involve the heart and mind and love. Please! Sociologists have proven homosexual relationships to be as stable and long lasting as those of heterosexuals.

Myth No. 2: What IT is . . .

I am continually dumbfounded at the number of people who will disavow any relationship with homosexuals and homosexuality, and yet in the same breath will offer the verdict of an expert on what IT is. Why doesn't anybody bother to ask?

My Answer:

First of all, sexuality is a personal expression of each individual. And for that reason, one word can be true for me and false for someone else. I am an expert on myself as a human being with same-sex orientation and not in human sexuality in general.

What makes a person gay? A strong male or female role model? Hormones? Socialization? A highly social male or female role model with strong hormones? I DON'T CARE!

It could have been sunspots.

Similarly, homosexuality is not a phase — teething is a phase — attraction to a member of the same sex is not a phase. Without question, there are countless lesbians and gays who, in their mature years, have lived lives of remarkable growth and enduring happiness. Who can tell me that is possible for a group of people to be lost hopelessly in a "phase?" And besides, if homosexuality is a phase, then what does that make heterosexuality — you can't have it both ways.

Then there's this word "preference." Preference falls too easily into the trap of inferring a choice for which one can make the wrong decision, and for which we can then blame ourselves. When I was deep in the closet, I felt extreme guilt for this "wrong" turn my life had taken. The word "orientation" is

appropriate here, since it infers something about the direction in which one is going. However, preference is by no means a bad word; the word itself can quite accurately describe the comparative qualities of feelings. In the end, the best answer is probably that IT is people; people like me, my friends, some of you readers and some of your friends.

Myth No. 3: Conversions — born a-gay(-n)

This myth has much in common with the latter in that it is based in ignorance about homosexuality. But for its incredible lack of subtlety and its deep roots in popular paranoia, this one stands alone. After all, reality shares little with the belief that these devious homosexuals are trying to take over the country and maybe even the world by sneaking into unsuspecting homes and converting youths to homosexuality. It would be good for a laugh if some misguided people didn't think it was true.

My Answer:

Little Billy is home alone. There is a knock at the door. He opens it to find a sneaky door-to-door fag standing in front of him. Here's the pitch: "Hi, Billy! I waited until your parents weren't home so I could sneak my way into their home and subvert their upstanding American parenting, which would have turned out another good heterosexual. How would you like to be gay? You get to struggle for years with feelings of self-denial and guilt, risk possible alienation from family and friends when you come out, and be subjected to discrimination and violence. Sound great?" Many closeted individuals, while not swallowing such a tale, do begin to identify themselves as a part of something bad. These are attitudes which could very well postpone for excruciating years any outreach to those who would prove supportive of same-sex feelings.

Myth No. 4: The Cure

"I had this friend, and he was like that for a while, but then — well I don't know what he did — he stopped. He was cured."

— a quote from my experience

My Answer:

I am gay and I am not sick. Being gay is not an illness. Just imagine this dialogue:

"Gee Jan, you're looking a bit under the weather. Got a touch of the flu?"

"No, I'm just feeling lesbianish today, and Sudafed won't do a thing for me." I do not want to imagine how many gays and lesbians have suffered at the hands of quack cures so as to assuage their "guilt" at being "sick." Homosexuality is not listed as a disease by the American Psychological Association. I do not doubt that some persons become so harshly repressed by these so-called treatments that they retreat entirely back into the closet, but sexuality is sexuality and homo is no more or less changeable than hetero.

Well there you have it. That's what happens when you close your eyes and try to drive: you run far off the road. To be sure, information — the truth — is the best deterrent to such myths and let's hope the word is out of the closet. Homosexuals don't live out their lives in sexual encounters and loneliness. Sexuality is sexuality, it is an orientation. No one has ever been, or is in the process of being, or will ever be converted. Gays and lesbians do not need a cure, because we are not sick. At the end of writing this article, I am struck by one thought: how wonderful it would be if, in ten years, a gay or lesbian youth could read all I have written and be surprised that anyone ever believed such nonsense.



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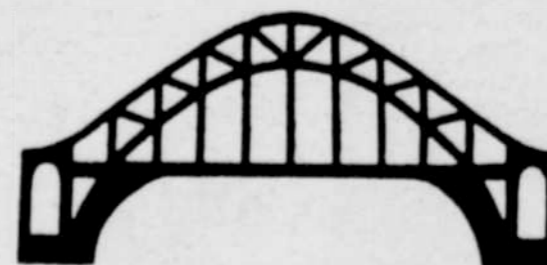
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