

Could you pick out the gays or lesbians in this group?



Probably not.

The reason is that this is an **invisible minority**. Sexual orientation doesn't have typical outward manifestations, such as race and gender often have. Lesbians and gay men find themselves sexually and emotionally attracted to people of the same sex. The attractions, emotions and bonding they experience in their relationships are the same ones that heterosexual men and women experience. The invisibility and the negativity that has existed in the past have made it difficult to collect statistics, but the general figure accepted by many is that roughly 10% of the population is predominantly gay. This figure is believed to be consistent in different societies, and among people in all sorts of careers.

Recognition of and the promotion of understanding of this minority has occurred somewhat later than for other minorities. Gay and lesbian persons have often suffered serious abuse, violence and discrimination. Because of this, and their invisibility, many gay men and lesbians have remained in the "closet," being very careful about revealing their sexual orientation. For that reason, **"Coming out"**, admitting their sexual orientation first to themselves and then to others, is a significant process in the lives of homosexuals.

While their invisibility can offer a kind of protection when the social environment is hostile, it has some bad effects. Gay and lesbian people often experience a lack of affirmation about that part of their nature (the assumption that it doesn't exist), and their relationships are often not taken seriously by others, and are sometimes even discouraged. They may feel isolated or alone. Research indicates that perhaps as many as 30% of suicide attempts by youth are related to sexual orientation issues.

Homophobia is a term that has come to be used to refer to negative feelings people have about homosexuals and homosexuality. These negative feelings are issues gay and lesbian people as well as others have to deal with. In addition, it is often assumed that everyone is heterosexual or, if not, they should be because only heterosexuality is "Right and Normal". This is **heterosexism**. Failure to recognize that some people are not heterosexual and that their significant relationships are with people of the same sex can lead to a sense of social isolation for gay or lesbian persons, and feelings that they are unacceptable, ignored and alone.

What are some of the myths about homosexuality?

1. Gays and lesbians have chosen their sexual orientation.
2. Homosexuality and AIDS are synonymous.
3. Homosexuals wish to entice others into homosexuality.

4. Gay men hate women and lesbians hate men.
5. Gays and lesbians are easy to spot due to their appearance and behavior.
6. Homosexuality is just a phase of adolescent development that some people are still in.
7. Open discussion of homosexuality will lead to its increase.
8. Homosexuals are mentally ill.
9. The majority of child molesters are gay.
10. Gays and lesbians are the products of dysfunctional families.
11. Gays and lesbians were sissies or tomboys when they were young.
12. The major focus of homosexual relationships is sex.

All of the statements above are myths in the sense that they have been willingly believed but are not based on fact. The best scientific evidence we have to date indicates that none of these statements/myths are true.

What is homophobia?

"Homophobia: The fear of feelings of love for members of ones' own sex and therefore the hatred of those feelings in others...the belief in the inherent superiority of one pattern of loving and thereby its right to dominance." Audre Lorde

What are some examples of homophobic or heterosexual behavior?

- Assuming everyone in your class or office is heterosexual.
- Telling "jokes" that reinforce the false stereotypes related to lesbians and gays.
- Feeling uncomfortable about reading this brochure.
- Displaying signs or posters that denigrate homosexuals.
- Engaging in mail or telephone communication designed to harass a person because of his/her sexual orientation.
- Using vulgar language or physical violence to intimidate, ridicule or injure someone due to his/her sexual orientation.
- Failing to challenge a heterosexual remark or to discuss homosexuality for fear of being identified as lesbian or gay.

What is HARASSMENT based on SEXUAL orientation?

Definition: A form of sexual orientation discrimination which is prohibited by state law. Sexual orientation harassment is defined as verbal or physical conduct that is directed at an individual because of his/her sexual orientation and that is sufficiently severe, pervasive or persistent so as to have the purpose or effect of creating a hostile work or educational environment.

What can you do if you witness such harassment?

1. Be informed. Don't accept stereotypical characterizations and beliefs. Read reliable resources and talk to qualified persons. Educate yourself.
2. Respect confidentiality. If someone shares with you that they are gay or lesbian, or that they have been harassed because of their sexual orientation, respect that trust and be supportive. Offer to accompany the person to register a complaint.
3. Challenge homophobic behavior/attitudes. Don't remain silent when you hear remarks or witness acts that are anti-homosexual. Don't participate in inappropriate joking or conversation. Speak up and share your views about intolerance.

What can you do if you are a victim of such harassment?

1. Realize that you are protected from harassment by state law and policies established by the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities System which includes Minnesota State University Moorhead.
2. Talk to someone about what you have experienced. Visit with one of the contact persons listed in this brochure, or someone else you feel comfortable with.

Retaliation

No retaliation, including reprisal, intimidation, or harassment directed towards anyone who makes a complaint of sexual orientation discrimination/harassment will be tolerated by Minnesota State Colleges and Universities or its institutions, including Minnesota State University Moorhead. Such retaliation is also prohibited by state law. Any individual who intentionally engages in retaliation against any person who reports alleged sexual orientation discrimination/harassment or who intentionally engages in retaliation against any person who testifies, assists, or participates in any manner in an investigation or process in relation to a sexual orientation discrimination/harassment complaint, regardless of whether a claim is substantiated, shall be subject to disciplinary or other corrective action.

What is the policy of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities System?

Minnesota State University Moorhead, as a part of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities System, is committed to ensuring an educational and employment environment free of discrimination/harassment based on sexual orientation. Such behavior has no place in a University or work environment where students, faculty, and staff are expected to learn and develop to their full potential. Discriminating/harassing and violent behaviors which impede that potential are unacceptable within this system.

All employees and students should be fully aware that the policies of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities System specifically prohibit discrimination/harassment or violence against lesbians and gay men by employees and students at the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities System. Such activities violate both law and System regulations, and run counter to the ideals and principles of academic freedom, free inquiry, and freedom of speech which lie at the core of our academic traditions. Individuals found in violation of University policy will be subject to disciplinary or other corrective action.

This brochure is not intended to modify the formal Minnesota State Colleges and Universities Policy Statements. Copies of the formal statements are available from the Affirmative Action Office, Owens 214B, 477-2229 (Voice), the Office of Judicial Affairs, Comstock Memorial Union 222, 477-2174 (Voice), or at www.mnstate.edu/affirm.

Minnesota State University Moorhead is committed to a policy of nondiscrimination in employment and education opportunity. No person shall be discriminated against in the terms and conditions of employment, personnel practices, or student access to and participation in, programs, services, and activities with regard to race, sex, color, creed, religion, age, national origin, disability, marital status, status with regard to public assistance, or sexual orientation. In addition, discrimination in employment based on membership or activity in a local commission as defined by law is prohibited.

Minnesota State University Moorhead is an equal opportunity educator and employer and is a member of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system. This document can be made available in alternate formats by calling 218.477.5859 (Voice), or 1.800.627.3529 (MRS/TTY).

Where can you go for further information?

University Contacts:

Barb Seiler

*Affirmative Action Officer/
Title IX Coordinator*
Owens 214B
477-2229 (Voice)

Ashley Atteberry

Judicial Affairs Officer
Comstock Memorial Union 222
477-2174 (Voice)

Mike Parks

Director of Campus Security
1616 9th Ave. S.
477-5869 (Voice)

Cliff Schuette

Director
Counseling Center
Bridges 260
477-2227 (Voice)

Linda Fuselier

Co-Advisor
Ten Percent Society
Hagen 407T
477-22571 (Voice)

Ray Rea

Co-Advisor
Ten Percent Society
Center for the Arts 30
477-4621 (Voice)

MSUM Safe Zone is a network of students, faculty, and staff committed and trained to provide safe, non-judgmental and supportive contacts for all MSUM Community members who may be dealing with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or questioning issues.

For more information go to www.mnstate.edu/safezone

Other Resources:

Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG)

For information about PFLAG, call:
Hotline at 235-7335 (Voice)

Moorhead Public Library, 118 South 5th Street, houses a collection of books and videotapes related to homosexuality. A bibliography is available upon request.

For TTY Communication, contact the Minnesota Relay Service at 1-800-627-3529

