



THE
PINK
BOOKLET

51 MOST ASKED QUESTIONS
ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY

COMPILED AND ANSWERED BY
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**This booklet is dedicated to
Jerry Johnson**

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Preface

You pay a cost to assert your individuality and freedom. The struggle that ensues from not being able to fit-in is tackled in almost every given area of our lives, whether it is the religious views of your community or just an evening spent with the relatives and next of kin, too eager to find out about our future plans, with less than kind questions and opinions about the choices one has made so far to deal with life as we experience it.

These challenges even though not always entirely chosen by us do make our life more interesting to us and those around us, than we would be comfortable to accept. It's enough to set our loved one's teeth on edge when one chooses career paths that are drastically different than those of our ancestors' or those that they have set out for us, however the intensity of struggle becomes even more daunting when the difference lies in our sexualities. The difference between: whom you find sexually and romantically attractive, and whom you want to spend the rest of your married life with.

This is not just any difference or 'malfunction' that will make us face a few giggles but still earn us respectable sympathy from the inner circles of our family. This a difference that has torn families and friends apart and made one wilfully oblivious to grief and sufferings of the other, because their own pain caused by their understanding of the difference was blinding at best and hateful abandoning and attacking at worst.

I write this booklet with the intention of understanding and explaining the fears you might have about your loved ones and their "different-from-you" side of their sexuality.

This booklet is addressing the common questions and myths about homosexuality and bisexuality in our loved ones.

This booklet will also serve as the way to educate young and adolescent girls and boys discovering their sexualities, understanding and defending themselves or their friends and family members who are discovering their homosexuality and bisexuality in a social area, if need be.

This book is not divided into chapters as such; you can open any page of the book and start reading from the question on that page. However, the questions that we received during our research were divided according to the area of concern that they presented, for example if the question had more to do with the religious concerns of the person than the societal, then we have grouped it under the religious category, as opposed to the social or interpersonal.

Why the name 'The Pink Booklet?'

It is not entirely because the colour pink is somehow associated with homosexuality in men and femininity in general, but because of the following

reason primarily.

When we fire an employee, a part of our company we don't like or who doesn't work for us anymore or whom we don't see eye to eye with, we hand them the proverbial pink slip so that we can get a better employee who will help the company grow more and will hopefully have a better relationship with us.

In the same way there are parts of our psychological frameworks that are not working for us anymore and whose company is only distressing and grips us in fear and puts us in troubled relationships with others and ourselves. We hope to say goodbye to those parts of us through the pink booklet and get closer to our loved ones and ourselves in ever more enriching and growing relationships.

Disclaimer

This book is meant to help the readers understand same-sex sexual orientations and gender identities in order to help them with their interpersonal relationships. Even though it is intended primarily for the parents, family and friends of the sexual minorities, anyone can read it to gain better skills in interacting with people of diverse sexualities and gender identities.

As you read, you will see that this book provides scientific information from credible sources, but it is not to be confused for a medical peer-reviewed journal or to be used in place of psychotherapy in a clinical setting. We have made every possible attempt to ensure the information in this book was correct at press time. However, the author and publisher do not assume and hereby disclaim any liability to any party caused by errors or omissions, whether such errors or omissions result from negligence, accident, or any other cause.

We would also like to add that although this book addresses homosexuality in men and women equally, for the sake of linguistic convenience, the pronouns used are largely male, however they apply to women as well, unless the topic discussed applies specifically to the male body.

We hope this book is able to shed light on the sensitive subject of human sexuality, help elucidate the complexities of the matter, and make the reader see that when it comes to personal struggles with sexuality, people are more similar than different.

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About Homosexuality

1. What does my child mean when he/she says he/she is a homosexual person, i.e. he or she is gay?

When your child tells you that he is a homosexual person or 'comes out' to you as gay, they are telling you that they find themselves attracted towards a person of their own sex; a man who is attracted towards a man, or a woman who is attracted towards a woman. This is not just sexual attraction; this attraction is romantic and emotional as well. Don't worry, it's not a disease or disorder. It simply means that your child has different emotional and romantic needs than the vast majority of children that you see around yourself.

You must understand that when your child 'comes out' to you, he is trying to reach out to you and asking for your support on three levels:

- Personal
- Interpersonal
- Social

On a personal front, your child is conveying to you the fact that he is someone different than what you understand about sexuality, that he/she is gay or a homosexual person. You must understand that it requires great courage for your child to tell you that he is homosexual and for him to share with you what he/she has gone through, as a person of an unusual sexuality. In doing so, he is asking for your love and support as parents or guardians.

On an interpersonal level, your child is asking you to invoke every bit of love that you have for him because he is going to present to you an idea of himself that you may not fully understand or support. And although you may not find yourself at peace with this newly discovered side of him, he is asking you if you can find the strength to educate yourself on the matter instead of dismissing it outright as abnormal.

Then, on a social level, your child is asking you to stand by them and support him/her when he/she is ready to face the society as a gay or lesbian person resisting pressures of marriage and other societal norms that apply to heterosexuals. They are also asking you if you are ready to defend them in front of others if the same pressures also confront you as a parent/guardian of a homosexual person.

To understand this further, look around you or outside the window or think of all the different people you have met in and outside of your family. None of them look like each other; even identical twins have some differences in them. Our faces, heights, hair, eyes and many more things are very unique to us. We, somehow, seem to be fine with these differences because they are very evidently and unavoidably physical in nature and we come face to face with this physical variety of life almost on a daily basis and thus get used to the fact that there are a large variety of people in the world around us.

In the same way, we as humans are very different from each other in our sexual desires, orientations, fantasies and our understanding of our gender. In simpler words, just like we all look and behave differently, we all have a unique sexual nature. However, this difference seems more threatening to us than the above mentioned ones because we don't know much about these differences and the moral cloud around sexuality is filled with ambiguity and irrational judgments. Ask yourself a question: how can we all have same sexual natures? Since we expect our sexual natures to be a certain way for everyone, we thereby choose to club some people as abnormal or unnatural, if their sexual nature seems to not conform to our understanding of it. In reality, we all are very complex and unique.

2. Is homosexuality a choice? Can he/she choose to be straight again?

No, homosexuality is not a conscious choice. Your child did not wake up one day and decide that he or she wants to be someone who has a sexual and romantic attraction towards a same sex person. Ask yourself, did you ever sit down and select your own sexual attraction towards the opposite sex person? Or would you be able to now choose to be homosexual, if you so desired? So, if as a heterosexual person you did not choose your own orientation, how could a homosexual person be able to choose theirs? As humans we don't and we can't choose whom we get attracted towards. Most gay people report to have been aware of their homosexual feelings quite early on in life or during their adolescence.

In fact, it is reasonable to imagine that it was equally, if not more of a traumatic and confusing experience for them to gradually discover this side of themselves, as it might be for you now. It is important to understand that at such an emotional time, one could take a moment to ask your child or friend: "Are you okay?" "I hope you did not go through too much of a tough time accepting yourself." Sometimes acknowledging other people's pain can give you the strength to deal with your own.

So the question of whether they can choose to be straight again doesn't arise, when sexual orientation is not a matter of choice in the first place. A lot of people might erroneously think that one can choose their sexual orientation, however, it is quite clear from the scientific data that is available that sexual orientation and attraction is beyond human choice.

Also one needs to understand the difference between behavior and orientation.

Behaviour is: what you do in actions.

Orientation is: what you are inclined towards and what you want.

So even if a gay man or lesbian woman has been able to perform behaviourally in bed with the opposite sex, their orientation in terms of desirability and attraction towards same-sex doesn't change. Even the studies that report some religious therapy having successfully worked in "reorienting" people have

statistically negligible rate of any success. Even when the so-called successful individual cases are looked at in these largely self-reported studies, one finds that the researchers didn't differentiate between bisexual and homosexual individuals and no attention was paid to the distinction between behaviour and orientation.

In fact, most of the ex-gay movements are criticized for having instilled self-damning guilt and shame in their clients, during the unsuccessful attempts at trying to change sexual orientation of gay and lesbian individuals.

3. What makes some people homosexual?

Sexuality is an extremely complex subject, making it very hard to find one specific cause for homosexuality in human beings. But some theories are supported by more evidence than others, which makes them more likely explanations of unusual human sexuality than the conjectures prevalent in the socio-religious schools of thoughts.

Epigenetic theory: All human characteristics are encoded in the form of genes on human DNA. Everything from the colour of their eyes to their sexual interest develops in the pre-natal stages of human development. Epigenetic markers are chemicals that control to what degree a certain gene is expressed. Think of it as a switch that turns a gene on or off. The researchers found that a particular kind of epi-marks that are wrapped tightly around the DNA sequence, affect sexual preference in individuals without altering genitalia or sexual identity.[1] This research gives support to the hypothesis that homosexuality stems from the expression of certain genes on the DNA sequence connected with sexual preferences, as against earlier theories that pointed towards an independent gay gene.

Brain Structure theory: This is a somewhat inconclusive research aimed at studying the brains of heterosexuals and homosexuals. The research found that the structure of the brain of a gay man was very similar to that of a straight woman and vice versa for straight men and lesbians. Though, it is still to be conclusively proved if the structure of the brain affects sexuality or if the brain development follows sexual orientation which may have been decided on the genetic level.[2]

Hormone theory: This is another popular theory also related to prenatal development. Research suggests that during the sexual development phase in the womb, the child is subjected to androgens or male hormones like testosterone that influence the sexuality of the child. A male child exposed to less testosterone during development may stand chances of being gay. Conversely, a female fetus exposed to more than normal testosterone may become a lesbian.[3]

Despite the many researches, no serious scientist today suggests that a simple cause-effect relationship applies to sexuality [4]. It is also probable that all of the above factors, in part, help influence the sexuality of a child. However, the

bottom line is that the common denominator of all of these studies is that sexual orientation cannot be chosen and is not a mental or genetic disease; nor can one become homosexual by being molested by a member of the same sex as it is popularly believed. It is important for scientific purposes that the cause of homosexuality is understood, but it is more important that we treat people of less common orientations with dignity and respect.

4. Is homosexuality natural; is it seen anywhere else aside from human beings?

We need to first look at the definition of natural itself. We tend to believe that whatever is the “norm” is natural, or what we are accustomed to seeing as common and usual is natural. One must understand that everything that exists in nature is natural. For instance, a person who has grown up in a cultural setting seeing only brown eyes, may find blue eyes unnatural because he/she hasn’t seen them before. We must understand that ‘unfamiliar’ is different from ‘unnatural’. Rig-Veda, one of the four canonical sacred texts of Hinduism, says ‘Vikriti Evam Prakriti’ which means that even anomalies that exist in nature are a part of nature.

Homosexual behaviour has been observed in 1500 animal species other than human beings and is not just limited to homosexual sexual behaviour but also pair bonding, where animals pair up for companionship for extended periods of time as mates. No species has been found in which homosexual behaviour has not been shown to exist, with the exception of species that never have sex at all, such as sea urchins and aphids. Moreover, a part of the animal kingdom is hermaphroditic, truly bisexual. For them, homosexuality is a redundant matter. [5]

Homosexuality has also been a part of ancient cultures worldwide, including India, and has never been held in a negative light. In fact, there are ancient temples with explicit carvings of homosexual sexual behaviour among similar depictions of heterosexual sex. Construction of Hindu temples in stone began around the sixth century of the Common Era. Construction reached climax between the twelfth and the fourteenth century when the grand pagodas of eastern and southern India such as Puri and Tanjore came into being. On the walls and gateways of these magnificent structures we find a variety of images: gods, goddesses, demons, nymphs, sages, warriors, lovers, priests, monsters, dragons, plants and animals. Amongst scenes from epics and legends, one invariably finds erotic images including those that modern law deems unnatural and society considers obscene. Curiously enough, similar images also embellish prayer halls and cave temples of monastic orders such as Buddhism and Jainism built around the same time. [6] References to homosexuality and complex gender identities have also been part of our mythology and legends. Arguably, homosexuality was held in the same regard as heterosexuality in our culture during pre-British times.

But even if someone were to disagree with that notion, in any case, the modern man doesn’t necessarily have to look at the behaviours of his ancestors as a

moral sanction for his actions today. For example, regardless of the length of time and the social reasons at the time, the tradition of Sati cannot and should not be followed today, as it stands in clear violation of our modern values of gender equality and freedom.

It is fundamental that an idea ought to be considered valid not because of its time frame and how many people support it, but because it is in consonance with physical reality and human nature.

5. What is the difference between sex, gender, orientation and mannerism?

Sex: The physical appearance of the body and the genitals

According to this classification, we generally see; Male, Female and Inter-sexed individuals.

Gender: The mental perception and experience of your physical body.

According to this classification, we largely see; Man, Woman and Trans-gendered (Hijra). That is not to say other unclassified genders don't exist.

Orientation: whom do I get attracted towards?

According to this classification, we largely see; heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, asexual, pansexual etc

Mannerisms: A habitual gesture or way of speaking or behaving.

According to this largely social classification, we generally see: Masculine, Feminine and Androgynous behaviours.

Gender identity and sexual orientation are often confused, as are mannerisms and orientation. Gender identity describes the gender(s) people consider themselves to be (man, woman, or transgendered). Sexual orientation refers to a person's pattern of attraction to other people including physical, emotional, sexual, and romantic attraction. These patterns of attraction are usually identified in the following manner:

Heterosexual (straight) refers to a pattern of attraction to the opposite sex

Homosexual (lesbian or gay) refers to a pattern of attraction to the same sex

Bisexual refers to a pattern of attraction to both sexes

"**Questioning**" is a term used to describe people who are not yet certain which (if any) pattern of attraction best suits them.

It should be noted that an attraction is an internal psycho-emotional experience and should not be confused with sexual behaviour. Therefore, sexual orientation refers to a pattern of physical, emotional, sexual, and romantic attraction to others, which may or may not be acted upon. Like gender identity, sexual orientation is usually described as a range, with "exclusively heterosexual" on one end, and "exclusively homosexual" on the other, and bisexuality falling in between these two poles.

Mannerisms on the other hand are patterns of behaviour or personality traits in gesture or speech. Certain mannerisms tend to get classified as masculine, feminine or androgynous based on social conventions and observable

differences in these patterns of behaviour in the sexes. Despite this classification, mannerisms are mostly independent of gender or orientation even though certain co-relations may exist. For example, one may encounter straight men whose mannerisms are feminine or vice versa. The stereotype that gay men are largely feminine stems from the fact that public attention is easily drawn towards things that are out of norm; in this case, a man who is feminine or a girl who is masculine in their mannerisms.

Parents may find greater acceptance and compassion once they understand that gender identity and sexual orientation are not something their children wilfully choose and be able to deal with their own deep-seated fear of encountering femininity in their son and masculine behaviour in their daughter. Nonetheless, it can still be highly distressing for families as their children sort out their sexuality. It is best if parents can find a way to adapt and co-exist with the fact that their child is sexually different, in order to continue to provide their children with unconditional love and support during these sensitive years so that their relationship remains intact and nourishing to everyone involved.

It is quite possible to be loving and supportive, even where there is disagreement. Harsh criticism and angry accusations only serve to alienate children and rarely produce any lasting behavioural change.

6. Is it because of hormonal imbalances? Is my son impotent?

No, homosexuality has no links to hormonal imbalances or impotence. As mentioned earlier, hormones play very different roles after birth than they do in the environment of the womb during sexual and brain development. After birth, during various points in a human being's life cycle, hormones play different roles in the physical and sexual development of the person as well as regulating various bodily functions essential to life. Sex hormones serve purposes like masculinizing or feminizing a person's voice during puberty, growth of facial hair in men or regulating the menstrual cycle in women. At this stage, these hormones do not affect the sexual orientation of a person but may affect his/her libido. To put it simply, imagine hormones to be like the fuel in a car, the fuel can only make sure the vehicle performs but the fuel can't decide the direction in which the car moves.

If a person is subjected to excess and unnecessary hormones by means of 'hormone replacement therapy' it will not affect his sexuality but, in fact, may end up causing various diseases or malfunctions in the person's body like fluctuations in libido, sleep disorders, mood swings etc. It can even increase the risk of strokes, heart diseases, cancer and blood clots. Hence even under necessary conditions like in gender dysphoric people who are undergoing a sex change process, hormone replacement is highly supervised and controlled.

Impotence is a state of sexual infertility where men are unable to produce children because of low sperm motility or erectile dysfunction. This condition has nothing to do with sexual orientation, which means that both heterosexuals and homosexuals can suffer from impotency; the treatment of which will also not

affect the person's sexual orientation, only the condition of impotence.

If impotency were linked with homosexuality, it would mean that gay men who are forced into marriage would not be able to have children, which we know, from various researches, to be untrue. This is a very popular myth about homosexuals that they seek relationships with people of their own sex after discovering that they are impotent or unable to perform with members of the opposite sex. Your child has not made a conscious choice to be homosexual to run away from situations of sexual inadequacies but because they are naturally predisposed to being attracted to a person of their own sex, with whom they can have fulfilling sexual and romantic lives.

7. What exact bodily changes and emotions do you feel when you are attracted to a person of the same sex?

A better question to ask would be, "How do I feel when I am attracted to another human being?"

Attraction and love are human emotions that we all experience in similar ways. The feelings experienced by any person in love are the same regardless of their sexuality, be it homosexual or heterosexual. There are numerous studies that show the physical changes that occur in the human body when that person is faced with someone he is attracted to, like the dilation of the pupils, flushing of the lips and cheeks, increased heart rate, right down to the brain activity.

In a study by Professor Semir Zeki and John Romaya from the Wellcome Laboratory of Neurobiology at UCL, 24 subjects of unidentified sexual orientation were asked to view pictures of their romantic partners, as well as pictures of friends of the same sex as their partners but to whom they were romantically indifferent, while the activity in their brains was scanned with functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI).

The fMRI results showed a very similar pattern of activity between homosexuals and heterosexuals of both sexes and involved activation of both cortical and sub-cortical areas, mainly in areas that are thought to be important in regulating emotional relationships and bonding between individuals. [7]

There may be cultural differences in the way we express love depending on who or where we are, but it doesn't change the human experience of attraction. Our sexuality does not alter our capacity to experience an emotion any differently than our capacity to, say, experience pain or sadness.

8. Isn't it illegal to be gay in India?

Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code which is used against homosexuals criminalizes any non-vaginal sexual act on the grounds of being unnatural. So, it is more the sexual acts between homosexual people that are deemed illegal and not the identity. One cannot be arrested for declaring their homosexuality in public, but one could be arrested if it were proved, with

sufficient evidence, in the court that one has indulged in any form of non-vaginal penetration; either oral or anal. This means that this section also criminalizes heterosexuals who indulge in the same activity regardless of their orientation.

On 2nd July 2009, the Delhi High Court had read down this law to make sex between two consenting adults legal. This meant that any two people of consenting age, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender, could indulge in sexual acts without being penalized for doing so.

However, that judgment was challenged in the Supreme Court by certain religious and moral extremists. On 13th Dec 2013, the Supreme Court reinstated Sec 377, declaring that it was the Lok Sabha's prerogative to change the law, not the court's. This judgment has been widely criticized by the media as well as all the progressive-minded people, and currently, appeals are being heard against the judgment.



Parent Related Queries

9. Do parents play a role in the development of their child's sexual preference? Did we (parents) make some mistake in his/her childhood?

OR

10. Had he told us when he was younger, could we have done something about it?

This question stems from another popular Freudian myth about homosexuality - that it's environmental and that an absent or overbearing parent can affect the child's orientation. Homosexuality is largely a result of natural predisposition of a person that cannot be altered or influenced by childhood experiences or acts.

There are many case studies that have proved that even if the childhood environment is in support of or against homosexuality, it does not change the innate nature of the child.

A notable example of this is a tribe in New Guinea in which boys are removed from female company at a young age and encouraged to engage in homosexual acts with older boys as a rite of passage. These boys spend a good portion of their teens fellating (giving oral sex to) older boys and ingesting their semen as a means to make themselves 'virile' and to prepare themselves for adulthood, much like the ancient Greco-Roman practice. After entering adulthood, almost all of these men except about 5% continue to lead completely heterosexual lives despite the prolonged past experience of homosexual sex with other boys in the tribe. 5% - the percentage of men who continue to have same sex sexual encounters even into adulthood - is the general percentage of gay men in most populations. [10]

Another similar example of nature versus nurture is that of David Reimer, who was a Canadian man, born as a healthy male, but was sexually reassigned and raised as female after his penis was accidentally damaged during circumcision. Psychologist John Money oversaw the case and reported the reassignment as successful, and as evidence that gender identity is primarily learned. Academic sexologist Milton Diamond later reported that Reimer failed to identify as female since the age of 9 to 11, and that he began living as male at age 15. Reimer later went public with his story to discourage similar medical practices. He later committed suicide, owing to suffering years of severe depression, financial instability, and a troubled marriage. [8]

As a parent, rather than dwelling on what you may have done wrong in the past, it might be better to focus on the present and how you can help your child lead a good life regardless of his orientation or gender identity and how you can be a better parent to them now, when they really need the affection and support from you.

11. Is it because the child was molested in childhood?

There is no substantial evidence to link CSA i.e. Child Sexual Abuse and homosexuality in adults and all studies that have claimed this to be true have been discredited as anecdotal evidence by experts in the field of sexual research. As we have previously addressed, likely causes of homosexuality in humans are largely biological in nature, at the genetic level, which is probably why sexual orientation has been shown to not be influenced or changed at any later point in a person's life.

In 2007, the Ministry of Women and Child Development published the "Study on Child Abuse: India 2007." This study, that included more than 15,000 participants including children, young adults and stakeholders across 13 Indian states, found that 53.22% of children reported having faced sexual abuse. Among them, 52.94% were boys and 47.06% girls.[9] Now, if claims that child sexual abuse survivors end up becoming homosexual adults, we should have a homosexual population of more than 50% in both sexes, however, this is not the case. Percentage of homosexuals in any given population is not more than 5-10% of the entire population.

There are, of course, co-relations that exist between the two, but that does not mean that CSA is a cause for homosexuality. It may just be that children that are apparently homosexual may be easier targets for abuse. Also, since statistically 1 out of every 2 children in India is sexually abused, it is only logical that half of the homosexual population would have been exposed to sexual abuse of some sort as a child leading to this myth.

Going back to the example of the New Guinea tribe given in the previous answer, we can further conclude that homosexual experiences in formative years, whether positive or negative, do not influence the innate sexual orientation of a person in his/her adult life. [10]

The American Psychiatric Association noted in a 2000 fact sheet on gay, lesbian and bisexual issues that "no specific psychosocial or family dynamic cause for homosexuality has been identified, including histories of childhood sexual abuse." The fact sheet goes on to say that sexual abuse does not appear to be any more prevalent among children who grow up and identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual than in children who grow up and identify as heterosexual.

This, however, does not mean that CSA does not affect the victim at all. CSA survivors have been known to struggle with issues of self-esteem, confidence in dealing with challenges of life and many other psychological issues but homosexual tendencies are not one of them. Such childhood experiences may give rise to a lot of fears and doubts, or influence the way we express our attraction and love, but not whom we love or who we get attracted towards.

12. Has the child's friends influenced him into being gay?

To quote the American gay-rights activist Harvey Milk, "How do you teach homosexuality? Is it like French? I was born of heterosexual parents, taught by heterosexual teachers, in a fiercely heterosexual society. So why then am I homosexual?"

This is true for most children, even yours. Most homosexual people grow up in mostly heterosexual environments at home, at schools and at workplaces. We are surrounded, largely, by heterosexual friends and family. Heterosexuality is implicit in our day-to-day interactions with everyone. For example, when anybody talks about their spouse or kids, it's simply meant to be understood that they are straight. Their heterosexuality is implicitly stated. Even popular culture like films and television, which is purported to be one of the most influential factors in our lives, is driven by heterosexual themes. So, how is it that homosexuals are not influenced by heterosexuality as easily?

The truth is that you are as likely to become homosexual in homosexual company as you are to becoming tall just because you make friends with tall people! You may aspire to being taller but that will not change who you are at the biological level. It cannot be transferred as behaviour to another person simply by introducing them to it.

It is, in fact, much later in life and with their own evolution as gay and lesbian individuals, that people seek out other gay and lesbian friends. As social animals, it is important for us to find like-minded individuals and form groups. We see this all the time with religious groups or people sharing common interests. This is even more likely to happen when a person feels threatened, less accepted or disapproved of in their existing social circles, as is generally the case with gay people, since most cultures do not look kindly upon homosexuality. We have an inherent need to feel accepted by our peers and when this need is not fulfilled, we invariably seek out people who share our lifestyles or understand our struggles. It is no different than people with similar interests in music or books coming together and becoming friends. It is the inclination that affects the choice of friends one has and not the other way around.

13. Do we have to be accepting of our child's partner?

It is like asking, 'Do I have to be accepting of what makes my child happy?' Imagine if your child were straight, and if he had brought home a girl or if she had brought home a boy, would you have been as uncomfortable? We need to understand what our romantic partners mean to us. Empathy will come much easier if you simply wonder how you would react if your family was disapproving or unhappy with your husband or wife. How would you react if you were invited to a party where your spouse was not allowed because the hosts were not comfortable with his/her presence? Would you have felt comfortable attending?

Love is one the highest values to human consciousness, second only to productive achievement in life. There is a proverb in Hindi, “Padhai, puja aur pyaar, kisi se keh ke nahi karwaye jaate” which means that one cannot be forced into these three ‘P’s: Padhai (study), Puja (Prayer) and Pyaar (love). So when your child feels that you are not invested in one of the most important things in their lives that give them joy, you are rejecting them as a person. You are saying that they and their choices are unacceptable to you.

When one loves someone, one seeks from them; attention, approval, acknowledgement and acceptance. This is true for parents and lovers alike. So when you disapprove of their romantic choices, it will most likely put a strain on your relationship with your child. If you believe your relationship with your child is important to you, then you must change the attitude you have towards his romantic needs. If you choose an attitude of reprimand or ridicule, you will most likely drive him away from your life.

This does not mean that you have to accept every decision that your child makes. If you believe the partner your son or daughter has chosen is not invested in, or will in any way, harm your child’s wellbeing or if you believe their morals are compromised, you can voice your disapproval. Your child should know that your disapproval comes from your concern for their happiness and well-being, and not in your discomfort with his/her homosexuality. Judge your child’s partner on his human qualities or behaviour and not merely on his/her orientation and gender.

14. Is it necessary to be open about one’s sexuality? Can he/she not suppress it and hope it becomes dormant?

Firstly, you need to understand that suppressing your sexuality would not make it dormant. Your sexual desires would only be suppressed if your libido were suppressed, which usually happens with age. As long as you are a sexually functional human being, your sexuality will be a part of you.

Let’s start by understanding this from the point of view of ‘identity’. Identity is our specific nature, made of specific attributes. Many human conditions, including homosexuality, can be looked at either as an illness that needs to be cured, or as identity that needs to be accepted. Just because you have an emotional experience of sexuality that is different from your child’s, that does not mean it is something that needs to be cured or fixed.

When you ask your child to suppress or hide their sexuality, you are basically telling them that the fact that they are gay is unacceptable to you. You are also indirectly telling them that their sexual orientation is something they should be ashamed of and hide, since it cannot be expressed in public.

Sometimes parents may not want society at large to know their child’s sexuality for fear of ridicule or persecution. This is generally the case in a country like ours where some regions are more liberal than others or some communities less

accepting than others. You may feel that your child could get physically or mentally harassed by the community you live in for being who he is.

Your child may have already been ridiculed on many occasions because of their skin colour, height, left-handedness, their unconventional looks, or anything that is beyond their control. If at those points you could see yourself trying to understand, console and encourage them to accept their differences, why not now? When your child sees you defending them instead of asking them to hide their sexuality, they see themselves as someone who is cared for and valued.

Even when you ask them to hide their sexuality because you fear for their life and safety, you must understand that though your fears are legitimate and rational, they cannot dictate long-term goals for your child. In our culture, heterosexuality is always implicit in dialog. Heterosexuality is asserted in every day to day conversation. Our children can be overwhelmed by it if they are forced to remain in situations where they cannot express themselves openly with reasonable honesty.

As parents, we should focus on helping our child achieve their long-term goal of being able to lead a truthful life, and be able to express themselves romantically and sexually without the fear of prejudice.

15. We know people who have been straight for a few years and then gay and then straight again. How do you explain that? Can it just be a phase?

Orientation is not a phase but the confusion that one has in regards to their sexuality, can be. This kind of confusion can come very easily to people when they start to realise that they're different and that they have to come to terms with a completely new side of themselves and having to plan their lives accordingly.

In most cases, these people may be genuinely bisexual, and bisexuality is known to cause a great deal of confusion for a lot of people. This generally stems from our need to belong to a group and be able to relate to it, but society generally does not accept bisexuality as an independent orientation. Because of this fear of not belonging, a person may end up choosing one over the other as a pattern of behaviour, but that does not necessarily change their orientation.

It is important for you to understand the difference between orientation and behaviour. Even though a homosexual person may be able to perform sexually with the opposite sex, it does not make him straight. A lot of times, homosexual people may be coerced into a heterosexual relationship or may want to conform or experiment with their sexuality to see if they can become straight so that they do not have to face the challenges that come with being a homosexual person. Such temporary phases of confusion may come in a person's life but one eventually goes back to their natural state of being whether it is straight or gay.

Even tall claims made by various ex-gay organisations in the west, of being able to successfully convert gay men and lesbians into heterosexual couples have all

failed in the long run as the participants have come back to their natural sexuality after a series of failed heterosexual relationships.

With people who have fluid sexualities, it is in their sexual nature to be able to be with different sexes at different times. This does not mean that they are able to change their orientation from one to the other or that they are unstable, but in fact, this fluidity is their sexuality. And although, fluidity or bisexuality is a form of sexuality, it does not necessarily mean that your child is bisexual or fluid. Sexuality cannot be understood as sides of a coin but rather it is a spectrum, with people who are exclusively heterosexual on one end, and people who are exclusively homosexual on the other, and a host of various intermediate sexualities in the midst.

16. What are the solutions to finding stability and happiness once I find out that my son/daughter is gay/lesbian?

Generally, happiness has to precede stability. Stability is a condition in life that we achieve on the platform of happiness. So for you to be able to find stability in your relationship with your loved one, it is very important for you to be able to find happiness in the situation and there are very practical ways of achieving this.

The first being knowledge. Educate yourself about homosexuality from credible sources like American Psychological Association, World Health Psychological Association, Indian Medical Association or talk to parents or siblings of other gay people and see how they have learnt to cope with their relationships.

The second thing that you might want to do is to talk to your child without judgment. Talk to them about their struggles, ask them how they feel or what they need. It is important for you to be able to hear him without any bias, without making him feel like he is diseased or abnormal in any way.

The third thing is to find meaning and significance. Human beings are the only species on earth who look for meaning and purpose in their lives and derive their happiness from that. For example, in a clinical experiment done with parents of newly born children with Down's syndrome, the set of mothers were asked to find meaning in their child's condition. It was seen that at the age of 2, the children with mothers who could construct a sense of meaning for their condition did much better than the children whose parents could not do so. We are not saying that homosexuality is in any way a disease, but the sense of adversity that a parent feels when their child is not who they wanted him/her to be is the same, and the attitude with which you look at this adversity will greatly influence the emotional health your child experiences.

Another thing that you as a parent would want to do is defend your child in social situations. You need to be able to face the society about your son or daughter's sexuality without being apologetic. A parent's view of their child generally serves as a template to how society views them or they view themselves. So when you treat them with dignity and show them that they are

not a dirty secret or socially unacceptable, that's when the society starts seeing them as such.

Lastly, an optional thing that you may choose to do is to help your child in their search for love. This does not mean you have to arrange a homosexual marriage for them, but be accepting and open about their romantic lives and make them feel comfortable with sharing that side of their life with you, if they so choose.

All this while, when you struggle to find happiness while dealing with your child's sexuality, remember to see the light in their eyes; the light that is a promise of love, beauty and success. It is only when we fail to see this light is when we fail as parents to stand beside our child in the face of adversity and strive towards their happiness. It is only when you become a source of happiness and stability in your child's life that you will see yourself being able to find the same in your own.

17. How do I deal with the social pressure of getting my child married or finding a long-term partner for them?

First of all, let us look at dealing with social pressures regarding your child's sexuality. Our social interactions with others can be looked at in the form of concentric circles, of which we are the center. We allow people who are in the circles closest to us to know the most about us than the people who are on increasingly outer circles of intimacy.

When dealing with close relatives, we can begin by first introducing the concept of homosexuality to them, getting them well-acquainted with the idea and educating them about the struggles of homosexuals. You can gauge from the interaction you have at this level, whether to allow them in the inner circles where they know about your child or whether your child is safer if they didn't know about him.

It is important that when you speak about your child to others in your social circles that you be unapologetic about it. It is extremely difficult for others to accept your child's sexuality when they feel that you are not completely sure about your acceptance yourself. When dealing with societal pressure of marriage, it is imperative that you make it clear to them that the decision to get married or be involved with someone romantically lies solely with your child and it is up to him to decide whether it is in his best interest.

As for helping your child find a long-term partner, you should first communicate with your child whether that is something they want or wish to focus their energy on. Sometimes, one can be in a point in their lives where they feel they cannot be in a relationship or choose not to be. It might also be that even if they want to look for a long-term partner, they might not want you to be involved in the process. As a parent, the most you can do is to be open and accepting of their romantic choices.

18. Is it okay to acknowledge but not approve of one's lifestyle?

Lifestyle is a series of choices that one makes in terms of how they want to live their lives. Since one cannot decide their sexuality, orientation can't be a lifestyle choice. However, the decisions one makes about how they wish to lead their life as a gay man or a lesbian would contribute to their choice of lifestyle.

Yes, acknowledgment and approval is not the same thing. One can acknowledge or accept a certain fact about someone without having to agree with it, but agreement requires a certain level of acceptance.

We must differentiate between a person and behaviour. One can accept a person without approving of their actions or behaviour, but it is important to accept the person.



Measure of Certainty

19. How can one be so sure? Is it just in his or her mind (state of mind)?

OR

20. Is it a trick that your mind plays to feel different/special from the rest of the people?

For one to understand sexuality as a trick that the mind plays, one needs to first understand the mind. The mind is a dynamic process that arises from the brain. There needs to be a basis for a thing in the biology of the brain for the mind to act a certain way and specifically in sexuality. This is because we do not decide who we get attracted to, or for that matter what we get attracted to or like, be it art, people or the food we like. We may not particularly know the reason why, but our bodies know when we like something.

An example of a mind trick would be a mirage in a desert. Your brain fools you into believing that there is water where there is none, but when you reach that place, you do not continue to think that the water exists. You will automatically realise that it was a trick since the brain has a built-in mechanism to correct its own misinterpretation of the facts of reality. Calling homosexuality a trick of the mind does not serve any purpose in understanding it, since a lot of people across countries and cultures do experience this sexual orientation. Are they all being afflicted by this trick?

Sexuality first arises at the biological level and is experienced at the mind level later. We first experience it as a biological desire, like for food or shelter, and then understand it at the cognitive level, which is why homosexuality can't be a trick of the mind.

The second belief that your child is acting out to seem special or rebellious is also not an adequate causation. Human beings wish to be special or noticed as a survival instinct since being noticed or considered special means that they would be provided for. If their providers like parents believe that their child is special, they will be more invested in their happiness. Human beings do have the desire to be perceived as special or different but only for the right reasons, homosexuality on the other hand is rarely considered an acceptable thing. So why would anyone decide to pretend to be homosexual and invite prejudice and hate into their lives, thereby reducing their chances at having a healthy social life? The reason why homosexual people want to come out is not to be considered special or stand out, but because they can't help doing so. They do so as a way to reach out and seek emotional support, because they are homosexual and the best thing one can do in such times is to provide them the support and love they need without judging their motives for doing so or being sceptical of their homosexual nature.

21. Is it because they have never had sex with the partner of the opposite sex?

OR

22. Do you think you are gay because there are no women around to relieve you sexually? Do you think you can have sex with a woman if we arrange a prostitute?

Let us tackle this by first asking ourselves, 'Are we straight because we have not had sex with the same sex?' Of course, that's not the case. We know ourselves to be heterosexual from the time we hit puberty - our bodies changed and we started developing an attraction towards the opposite sex. No one had to tell us that, we experienced it by ourselves because our hearts, bodies, minds and genitals all told us what we like and desire. This process is no different for homosexuals. They've also had the same automatic sexual responses but only to the same sex.

Pioneering researchers Masters and Johnson have conducted numerous studies on sexual orientation with huge sample sizes. In their book 'Sex and Human Loving' their research has found that a person with no sexual experience whatever may still consider himself or herself homosexual; also, many homosexuals are able to be aroused by heterosexual partners or heterosexual fantasies. [4]

They do not develop these feelings in the absence of the opposite sex. You can understand this better with the example of situational homosexuality, where sometimes men and women do seek sex with the same sex in a temporary situation when they don't or can't meet the opposite sex for extended periods of time, like prisons, hostels, military etc. Many people change their sexual behaviour temporarily, depending on the situation or at different points in their life. [11] This is not the case with most homosexuals; their desire for the same sex remains unchanged, even with the choice of the opposite sex being available.

As for having sex with a prostitute of the opposite sex, you have to understand that if they had wanted it for themselves, they would've sought it on their own without you having to arrange it for them. The other argument that one presents is that perhaps after trying sex with the opposite sex, they would lose interest in same sex sexual acts and become heterosexuals. There are a lot of gay men who have been forced into marriage by their parents with this same logic and most married gay people continue to seek sex with the same sex after they're married, or at least still feel attraction even if they suppress the urges to act on them. You cannot change what they desire by giving them something that they never had a desire for in the first place. The fact that they may or may not be able to perform sexually within the marriage does not change their innate orientation.

This also does a great deal of damage to their self-esteem when you repeatedly tell them that they are so unacceptable to you that you would go to any lengths to change their orientation instead of trying to understand or accept it. If you

have doubts about what your child desires, you only have to ask them to find out. Talk to your child and try to understand what they feel about the same sex or opposite sex, you are bound to realise that there is nothing different about what your child experiences in sex, love and attraction than you do, with the exception of the gender or sex of whom they desire.

23. Is it a western influence? Is it because you have been watching too many English movies?

No, homosexuality is not a western import. All cultures across the world have had homosexuality in their history and India is no exception. In fact, Indian texts from antiquity talk about homosexuality just the way they would talk about heterosexuality, with the exception of a few texts. Just one look at our cultural heritage from before “foreign” invasions would tell you that those temples in Khajuraho and Ajanta and Ellora and possibly every temple which is even as old as 800 years could not have been the product of a society which was sexually repressed, and statues depicting homosexuality are not a recent addition to the murals on those temples. It is a widely known fact that homosexuals form 5-10% of any population, irrespective of cultures, religious inclinations or nationalities. India has an approximate population of 2.5 million homosexuals. [12]

The reason why homosexuality is presumed to be a western concept is because gay and lesbian people in certain western cultures have struggled for equal rights for much longer in their countries than ours and thus a larger part of the population has started to accept their differences as a part of human diversity and not an abomination. It is due to this struggle that many western countries have grown to accept same-sex unions as civil partnerships and some even recognise gay marriages. Even countries that may not recognise such unions still do not condemn homosexual sex between consenting adults as illegal or immoral, and have anti-discriminatory laws against homophobic abuse or discrimination.

The media and popular culture is only a reflection of this growing acceptance by society, and hence one sees much more positive depictions of homosexuals and homosexuality in certain western countries. We have also started seeing a similar change in Indian media lately. Of late, many films and shows have pushed the envelope of conservative programming to include bold subjects like homosexuality. This, however, does not influence people to become homosexuals. We have already explained how homosexuality is a genetic factor and not a communicable pattern of behaviour. It would be like asking if one would acquire superhuman powers just by watching too many superhero movies.

Art is usually a reflection of what already exists in society and rarely the other way around. Popular media has only recently been depicting homosexuality in a positive light, while homosexuality and gay people have been around since recorded history exists.

Is change possible?

24. Do we know of any therapy that can change the sexual orientation?

In 1990, the American Psychological Association stated that scientific evidence shows that reparative therapy does not work and that it can do more harm than good. [13] Changing one's orientation does not correspond with changing one's behaviour. To change one's orientation would require altering one's emotional, romantic and sexual feelings, and reconstructing one's self-concept and self-identity. Furthermore, the APA pointed out that therapists who undertake this kind of therapy usually come from organisations with an ideological perspective against homosexuality. The APA has specifically stated that "orientation reparative therapy" (conversion therapy) is not recognized as a valid form of therapy.

Many of the claims made by ex-gay organisations of having successfully 'converted' gay and lesbian people into heterosexuals have been found to be short-lived as most of the people going through such traumatic forms of therapy have reverted to a homosexual lifestyle after suppressing their innate desires for a brief period of time where they may have become behaviourally heterosexual, but remained attracted to the same sex.

We must understand that you cannot cure something that is not an illness to begin with. Can one be 'cured' of the colour of their eyes? Or can they be 'treated' for their race? Invariably, every credible psychologist, psychiatrist and mental health professional has agreed that homosexuality is not an illness, mental disorder or emotional problem.

Wellbeing and emotional stability are defined as an individual's ability to live a fully functional life. Homosexuality, by itself, does not cause a person to stop functioning as a productive human being, but the abuse and rejection by peers or family, that comes with being a homosexual person, can cause a great deal of emotional trauma and suffering. There is ample evidence that societal prejudice causes significant medical, psychological and other harms to LGBT people.

For example, research on the issue of family acceptance of LGBT youth conducted at San Francisco State University found that "compared with LGBT young people who were not rejected or were only a little rejected by their parents and caregivers because of their gay or transgender identity, highly rejected LGBT young people were:

- 8 times more likely to have attempted suicide.
- 6 times as likely to report high levels of depression.
- More than 3 times as likely to use illegal drugs
- More than 3 times as likely to be at high risk for HIV and other STDs

There is plenty of empirical evidence to say that more than not having a cure, homosexuality does not 'need' a cure. And the best thing that parents and guardians of homosexual children can do to ensure the mental and physical well-

being of their children is to ensure the child is not made to feel unaccepted or rejected for his sexual orientation.

25. Why do gay people find it difficult to be in relationships?

There are many factors why relationships don't last. You can classify these in majorly 3 categories:

Social
Personal
Family

Things that do not have acceptance or recognition in society don't tend to register with people as important for themselves. Another important factor adding to this is that most gay men, though not all, grow up believing that they would never find love or their relationships would never last. It may sometimes even be the exact opposite where the expectation of a picture perfect fairy tale romance would render anything less than perfect as useless or not worth investing time in. The lack of a realistic expectation of love or self is usually the reason why gay men who find lovers are unable to hold on to them beyond a point, if they see it as imperfect or invalidated or end up believing that they are not worthy of love.

Besides this, one has to see that most gay people do not have precedence of other successful gay relationships to base their ideas of relationship on. In the absence of such a framework, many of us end up basing the relationship on existing models, so many of us end up trying to structure our relationships on heterosexual ideas of relationships that may or may not necessarily work for homosexual couples.

Many recent studies done on gay relationships have found the culprit in breaking gay people up to be more external than within the relationship. A study by San Diego State University followed more than 1000 gay couples and their married straight siblings over a period of decades.

One of the most notable findings was that by nearly every measure, same-sex couples reported higher levels of happiness in their relationships than straight couples. Gay couples reported far less conflict than heterosexual couples and higher levels of intimacy.

But, ironically, the breakup rate among gay couples in the study who were not in civil unions was 9.3 percent. Gay couples in civil unions had a breakup rate of 3.8 percent, while only 2.7 percent of heterosexual couples had split up.

While that may seem like a contradiction, the finding suggests that external factors — like family pressure, children and financial commitments such as a mortgage — may play a greater role than simple happiness, in the duration of heterosexual marriages. Gay couples typically report fewer close family relationships and are less likely to have children, so the primary driving factor

for togetherness is happiness.

The data also indicates that legal recognition, whether it's a civil union or a marriage, is a sort of glue that can help couples, gay or straight, sustain a long-term relationship. [14]

While these external influences are likely to change over time, homosexual couples continue to face these challenges on a regular basis and eventually take the easy road out.

Although all of these factors cannot be changed, as a parent, you can certainly help your child by being open and accepting of their relationship choices, by involving their significant others in your family life and if things do go bad, by lending them emotional support through the tough time, so that they can pick themselves up and not lose hope on love.

26. How can he be gay if he is not effeminate or girly?

Human beings come in all shapes and sizes, and in practically all combinations of interests and personality types. Gay men are no exception to this rule. Of course, some LGBT people can exhibit very stereotypical behaviour but that is not to say that the same are not shown by heterosexuals. Just like homosexuals, heterosexuals can also show non-stereotypical behaviour like a straight woman can act masculine and be dubbed a 'tomboy' or a straight man can have some effeminate characteristics or tone. This does not mean that their sexuality needs to be brought into question. It only goes to show that there is enough diversity in the world with regards to sexuality as well as gender mannerisms.

When we make assumptions like gay people are always in creative fields or that they wear pink, we often neglect the fact that there are enough heterosexuals who also do the same. Aren't there heterosexual men who may be creative and work in such fields? Would a heterosexual man cease to be heterosexual if he were to start wearing the colour pink? These are merely logical fallacies that one makes while stereotyping any community.

Today, as we inch closer towards social acceptance of homosexuality, fewer LGBT individuals feel the need to dress up to pass as straight men in order to hide their sexuality, while some may dress a certain way to make a personal or political statement. There are also certain people from different gay and lesbian subcultures or peer groups who may mimic and exaggerate specific behaviours. Because of the lack of open LGBT role models, queer youth sometimes do not know how to "fit in" to the gay community and therefore adopt stereotypical mannerisms thinking that this is the only way to express themselves. In order to belong to a community, they do things or behave in a way that they feel is expected of them.

However, now that the younger population becomes more comfortable with their identity and is able to assert it without having to act stereotypically, one

sees more and more gay and lesbian persons coming out who do not conform to stereotypes.



Religion

27. Isn't it against most religious practices in the world?

Well, a lot of things are against religious practices across various religions. In certain religions, it is a punishable crime to wear clothes made from two different fabrics; some believe women or certain racial groups are not supposed to have human rights, while many religions still believe that eating certain foods is wrong, although many others continue to consume them without any ill effects. You might follow a religion that disallows eating meat or a certain type of meat, but would you consider people from other religions who do, as immoral? Perhaps, in their eyes, your religious beliefs may be considered immoral.

You have to understand that religion originated as a tool by our hunter-gatherer ancestors to understand our environment, which is why in many religions natural phenomena like rain would be explained as the act of a certain god and this god would vary across religions. As we progressed, we developed science as a means to understand the same natural phenomena. Today, if your child were to ask you about rain, you would most likely refer to a science textbook and explain the water cycle to him, rather than look at a religious text about a rain-god.

In ancient times, most cultures in the world had very limited resources and populations, so any homosexual relationship was dissuaded since it did not support their idea of a family life or had any significance in terms of expanding population. Today, many scientific communities like the psychological community and biologists have declared sexual orientation as a part of the human condition. Will you believe credible scientific sources or ancient texts?

It is up to you to decide to what extent you want religion to dictate your relationship with your own body or with your loved ones.

28. Can my son believe in God and still be gay?

There is absolutely no connection between belief in God and being gay, or for that matter, being a good human being. There are just as many atheists who are straight, and many fundamental terrorist groups are also known for their belief in their God. Would you consider terrorists as pillars of morally upright behaviour merely on the basis of their religious beliefs?

The belief in God is an extremely personal experience in a human being's life. If one defines their God as someone who judges them on the basis of what they eat or who they love, then perhaps one might not be able to reconcile themselves with their beliefs; but if one defines their God as an internal driving force or a source of strength that one finds within themselves, then it wouldn't be a challenge for one to be a homosexual and still believe in God.

29. Wouldn't human society end if everyone were gay? Isn't sex meant for procreation?

This is a very common fear that many people have but you must understand that homosexuality is not chosen. It is a natural disposition that has been shown to occur in 5 to 10 % of any human population and also in the animal kingdom. The remaining population is heterosexual and will continue to be so.

And even if a majority of the population were to be homosexual, it doesn't have to mean that the human population has to end. Many homosexual couples today have the option of choosing surrogacy or artificial insemination to have children. You also have gay and lesbian couples coming together and having children together.

The acceptance of homosexuals in society will not cause the rest of the population to change their orientation; it would only make lives of homosexuals easier. In fact, if homosexuals were given adoption rights after due process, it would help them start their own families, giving caring homes to many orphans in the process.

As for sex as a means for procreation, do we really believe that human beings have sex solely to produce offspring? Yes, that is a major reason why sex is important to human beings, but sex is also a means of being physically intimate with a person one loves, as well as for recreation. If sex was solely a means to reproduce, then why would we need inventions like condoms and birth control pills? Do heterosexuals only have sex when the intention is to produce children?

Having kids is an extremely personal choice that an individual or a couple makes after careful deliberation, and many may choose to not have a child. If impotent people or straight couples that do not wish to have children are not forbidden from having sex, then there is no reason why homosexuals should not have the liberty of doing the same.

Relation with Heterosexuals

30. What is the relation like with the opposite sex then? Does he hate girls? Does she hate boys?

You need to first question what relationship you are actually talking about. Are you talking about a sexual or romantic relationship? Well, there exists none, unless, of course, they're bisexual. Our sexualities have absolutely no bearing on who we decide to be friends with. They may end up making friends with people who are gay-friendly because one can't be a friend with someone who they can't be themselves with or whom they would not feel accepted by. We make friends depending on how secure we feel around them, how much we have in common, what virtues they have that we admire or how cared we feel by them based on our personal interactions with them.

If you are straight, would you say that you hate the same sex? Do we only talk to people who we intend to have sex with, or are romantically attracted to? We can like people for a lot of different reasons but the basis of the relationships is always similar interests or the attention or acceptance that we experience in their company. We wouldn't hate someone because of his or her gender or any other thing like sexuality, which they have no control over. Consider this, would you hate someone, only because they don't have the colour of the eyes you find appealing? We only dislike certain individuals on the basis of how incompatible their thoughts or lifestyles are from our own, but one would not hate a gender only because one has no sexual interest in that gender.

31. But my son used to talk to a lot of girls in school and colleges and he still has so many female friends. What about that?

Do you have friends of the same gender? If yes, is it because you are sexually interested in them? As we've mentioned in the previous question, one does not need to be sexually or romantically attracted to be friends with a certain person. We befriend those who we feel comfortable around or those we have things in common with, and it's quite likely that a gay man would find himself very comfortable with a straight woman who he does not constantly feel a sexual tension with, and of course, has at least one common denominator of whom they find attractive. Similarly, straight women might also be drawn to gay men to be friends with, as they would feel least threatened by a man who does not have a sexual interest in them and is not looking for sexual or romantic interest in them.

This also does not mean that all gay men have close friends who are female. Some might even prefer the company of straight men but who we are friends with never decides or is not decided by who we get attracted to sexually.

Homosexuality and Society

32. Is homosexuality a threat to social and moral fabric of a country?

We first need to analyse the word 'threat'. A threat is a menace that may restrain a person's freedom, or compromise the political security of a country. The social and moral fabric of a country may only be under threat if the acceptance of homosexuality would take from you, your freedom to choose or act the way you desire. This is not the case; in fact, acceptance of homosexuality by society only allows homosexuals to experience the same sort of freedom that heterosexuals have been enjoying. The freedom to choose to be with the one they love and to act on those feelings.

If gay people had the right to marry, it would only mean that they would not be stopped from marrying someone they love, it does not mean the rest of the population would be forced into homosexual marriages.

Imagine, if tomorrow the government were to take away your right to practice your religion and not others'. Would you not feel that the moral or social fabric is under threat? So, it is precisely the taking away of equal rights from the people, that is a threat to the country and its social and moral fabric.

33. Why do gay people put their parents to shame? Don't you want to make your parent proud and happy?

Shame is an emotion we experience when we feel that we have not lived up to society's standards or expectations of us. Shaming is also a deliberate attempt made by someone to make us appear inappropriate. In asking that why your child is shaming you, you assume an intention on your child's part to shame you, but if homosexuality cannot be chosen by an individual, the intentionality cannot be brought into question.

Consider a situation where your child has secured 99% in an examination. You would feel very proud of your child in this instance because this is considered a great achievement in the eyes of the society, though it does not guarantee your child's success in life or his happiness. Conversely, you can imagine many would be ashamed to have a child who is dark, short or has special needs, but these would not be considered as a deliberate attempt by the child to shame the parents. Homosexuality is also beyond your child's control just like attributes like height or skin colour.

In fact, if you consider homosexuality as your child's attempt at shaming you, there are more chances of you ensuring that your child internalises the shame and develops a low self-esteem. For you to be able to deal with the shame that you experience about your child's homosexuality, you must first ask yourself why you feel ashamed about it in the first place. Once you are able to understand that it is not something to be ashamed of, you will be able to have a healthier relationship with your child.

34. He is my only child? What will happen to my family name?

He is gay, not impotent. There are dozens of options open to your child to become a parent; he can adopt, have a child through a surrogate mother or even get into a family arrangement with another lesbian couple and raise children together. There is no dearth of options if you only open yourself to the possibility of having grandchildren through unconventional means. These are the same options that would have been available to your child even if he were straight but unable to have children the “normal” way.

The only thing that can come in the way of your family name living on is if you keep pushing your opinions and wishes on your child, forcing him to move away from you under the pressure. If your child feels that you are accepting of him, and in extension, of a child that he may wish to bring into his life, he will be in a more favourable state of mind to do so.

35. How does his sexuality change the relationship I have with him? Will I be left alone?

You need to understand that your child has been gay all along; the only difference was that you weren't aware of this fact. So it isn't the fact that can change the relationship, but your evaluation of this fact. Relationships are not based on orientations, they are based on virtues; it is not based on what the person is, but who he is or how he is with you.

Consider an example where someone you've known for a while reveals a special quality about themselves. If the quality is something that you would respect, like perhaps speaking a foreign language or having a special talent, your relationship could only change for the better. If the same person were to reveal a quality or an opinion that you don't agree with, like if they are racist or have committed a crime, then you will definitely not hold him in the same regard. So, whether your relationship with your son/daughter changes for the better or for the worse, can only be decided by your evaluation of the fact that your child is homosexual.

As for your fear of being alone or being abandoned by your child, it is actually quite irrational. You must understand that your child has just shared a very important part of his personal life with you; why would he do that if he did not feel that you are important enough in his life? In fact, your child, at this juncture, has the same fear about you deserting him because of his sexuality. You must assure your child that he/she holds the same place in your life as they did before. It may not be an easy fact to digest so quickly, but you can assure him/her that you will try your best to understand their position and get over your reservations about his/her sexuality.

36. How will my child ever have a successful life? Will he have a successful married life?

Well, the answer largely depends on what parameters you use for success. If your parameters for success say that your child needs to have a family with

wife/husband and kids, fame, fortune etc. then, perhaps, your child might not be able to match up to those standards. What you must reflect upon is the fact that success and happiness are two separate entities. Not every successful person is necessarily happy with his life and not every happy person would be considered successful by society's standards.

Your child may or may not become successful based on his personal choices and aptitude, but you can ensure that he grows to be a happy human being by providing a supportive and nurturing family environment to him. A happier person is also more likely to achieve success in his life. His sexuality will not hold him back from that, but an unhappy family life can.

Homosexuality or even heterosexuality has no bearing on success in life. Are there no unsuccessful heterosexuals? There are many examples of successful gay men and women in India and all over the world. Consider the world-famous singer Ricky Martin, for example, or the fashion designer, Rohit Bal, or National-award winning filmmaker, Onir. There are plenty of homosexual people who have achieved great success in their respective fields and there is absolutely no reason why your child cannot achieve the same.

As for having a successful married life, your child will only have a successful marriage if he/she is married to a person they love and truly care about; which, in this case, would be a person of the same sex. Heterosexual marriages have failed as well and the reasons are invariably dissatisfaction or the lack of a loving relationship. If you force your child to marry a person of the opposite sex, then no matter how great their spouses are, they will never have a good married life. However, if they were allowed to be with someone that they love and hold dear, regardless of the sex of the other person, then there is no reason for them to not be happy in their marriage.

37. But isn't it true that this kind of alternate lifestyle can be really dangerous?

The idea of homosexuality being a dangerous lifestyle choice is a misconception and blatant stereotyping of all gay men and women. Let us reiterate, once again, that being homosexual is not a choice. There is substantial scientific evidence that suggests that sexuality is a genetic predisposition that is decided in pre-natal sexual development of a foetus.

The second most important thing is that one cannot stereotype gay men and women as being self-destructive. There may be certain gay men and women who may exhibit certain self-destructive behaviour of substance abuse or sex addiction, but these are not conditions that are limited to just the homosexual community. Have we never seen self-destroying, drunk and addictive people in the heterosexual community?

The truth is that homosexual people are just like heterosexuals and are just as varied. Some may have certain issues but most homosexual people are just average human beings, who have the same lives as heterosexuals. Their lifestyle

does not include anything different than earning a living, looking for romance and fulfillment and finding a productive purpose in life.

It is simply a negative stereotype created by homophobes who only see homosexuality as a sex-driven pattern of behaviour. There is more to homosexuals than their sexual practices and in fact, if you ever sat down and spoke to gay people about their lives, you might grow to realize that their sexual behaviour is perhaps the only thing different in them from yourself.

38. Are most paedophile men gay?

Members of disliked minority groups are often stereotyped as representing a danger to the most vulnerable members of the society. For example, Jews in the Middle Ages were accused of murdering Christian babies in ritual sacrifices. Many black men in the United States were often lynched after being falsely accused of raping white women. In a similar fashion, gay people have often been portrayed as a threat to children. Back in 1977 in America, when Anita Bryant campaigned successfully to repeal a Dade County ordinance prohibiting anti-gay discrimination, she named her organization "Save Our Children," and warned, "A particularly deviant-minded teacher could sexually molest children".[15]

The fact, however, is that Paedophilia has absolutely nothing to do with sexuality. Paedophiles can be both heterosexual as well as homosexual. It is a psychiatric disorder in adults, typically characterized by a primary or exclusive sexual interest toward prepubescent children; this interest can be either towards young boys or girls and generally has little to do with the orientation of the perpetrator. According to research, in most cases of child sexual abuse, the perpetrator is most likely to be a man and 90% of convicted paedophiles have generally no interest in adult males and identify as heterosexuals; molestation of young girls by adult women is next to none.

Another problem arises because of terminology; sexual abuse of male children by adult men is often referred to as "homosexual molestation." The adjective "homosexual" (or "heterosexual" when a man abuses a female child) refers to the victim's gender in relation to that of the perpetrator. Unfortunately, people sometimes mistakenly interpret it as referring to the perpetrator's sexual orientation. It is often found that paedophiles generally don't care about the gender of the victim as much as they care about their age. Sexual abuse isn't about sexual attraction; the perpetrators are motivated more by power and control, not by sexual desire. Paedophilia isn't about gay or straight or bisexual. Abusers abuse those they have access to. A high number of boys are molested, not because molesters are disproportionately gay or bi, but because arguably, men typically have more access to boys than to girls.

We must understand that co-relating paedophilia to homosexuality because most victims are boys, is the same as perhaps co-relating heterosexuality and rape of women.

39. Why do gay people use the word 'queer' to define themselves?

To understand the word 'queer' in terms of homosexual identity, we must first know a little about the history of gay activism in the west, since that is where this word gained impetus as an identifier for gay men and women. Since its inclusion in the English vocabulary in the 16th century, the word 'queer' has generally meant "strange", "unusual", or "out of alignment". It might refer to something suspicious or "not quite right", or to a person with mild derangement or who exhibits socially inappropriate behaviour. Subsequently, for most of the 20th century, "queer" was frequently used as a derogatory term for effeminate gay males who were believed to engage in receptive or passive anal/oral sex with men, and others exhibiting untraditional gender behaviour.

You might wonder why gay people would want to use something so offensive or hurtful to define themselves. Well, during the 90s, when gay activism was on the rise in the west, activists decided to reclaim the word and disarm it by redefining it as an umbrella term for sexual and gender minorities that are not heterosexual, or conforming to the gender-binary. It is the equivalent of taking a gun that someone is pointing at you and removing the bullets so that even if they continue firing at you, they have lost the power to hurt you. The term was also more inclusive to other forms of sexuality and gender identity that had yet not been defined by labels. The term allowed for people to be able to define themselves without containing themselves in strict frameworks of any label or identity.

But because of the way that the word was reclaimed, it still holds very strong socio-political connotation and some gay men and women may still not agree to the use of the word. But the larger community accepts it, as it means "outside the bounds of normal society" and can be construed as "breaking the rules for sex and gender". It is because of this fluid or non-specific definition that it can be used by almost anyone who finds themselves not falling in the conservative heterosexual bracket. The range of what "queer" includes varies. In addition to referring to LGBT-identifying people, it can also encompass: pansexual, pomosexual, intersexual, genderqueer, asexual and autosexual people, and even gender normative heterosexuals, whose sexual orientations or activities place them outside the heterosexual-defined mainstream.

But largely for queer identified people, it is the fact that the term simultaneously builds up and breaks down boundaries of identity, and that is liberating. It allows them to define themselves as queer and then reject any heterosexual construct of identity.

40. Why do gay people need to be open about their sexuality when heterosexual people are not?

The very first assumption that heterosexuals are not open or loud about their sexuality is incorrect. Heterosexuality has always been implicit in dialog and is always assumed as the default, unless stated otherwise. We see the declaration of heterosexuality so often and so matter-of-factly in our daily lives that it does not register with us as anything but normal. Every time a colleague announces that his lunch was made by his wife or that his child is doing well in school, they

are asserting their heterosexual identity; every time they ask when you are getting married or if you have a girlfriend, they are assuming your identity as heterosexual because that is the norm.

Even when you see the segregation of the sexes that exists in certain public settings like temples or weddings, it is a sign of assumed heterosexuality. Heterosexuality is also expressed in popular culture and in the media as a standard; it is only recently that film makers and television shows have started dealing with homosexual themes positively and even then it has been considered scandalous or at the very least sensational. The love between two homosexual men or women is still not considered as acceptable behaviour. It is, in fact, because of heterosexuality being loudly and unanimously talked about that any mention of homosexuality comes across as invasive or a threatening display of sexuality.

It is difficult for heterosexuals to understand that the reason it is important for a homosexual person to assert his identity is that the heterosexuals have been taking the same right as granted all their lives. Can you imagine a person who was held in captivity for years and then released? A person like that would feel the greatest joy simply being free or having the freedom to simply be able to roam around freely, which a person who was never contained would not feel. To an outsider, this person's euphoria would be considered irrational. The same applies to gay men who have come out of the closet. For the longest time, they've had to live in another person's skin and pretended to be someone that they are not. When they come out, for them, it is a liberating experience to be able to assert their sexuality in simple non-threatening ways, the way that heterosexuals have been able to do all along.

Sexual & Mental Health

41. Doesn't homosexuality cause AIDS and other STD's?

AIDS or Acquired Immuno-Deficiency Syndrome is a disease caused by HIV (Human immunodeficiency Virus) where the person's immune system starts to fail and he succumbs to other opportunistic infections and diseases that a person with a healthy immune system would be able to fight off. AIDS is a terminal condition caused by the virus and having the virus, in itself, does not mean that the person has AIDS. The reason HIV and AIDS is generally considered a homosexual disease is because a larger percentage of gay men than straight men are affected by HIV because of inadequate knowledge of safe sex behaviour or lack of information about condom usage. It is because of the inadequacy of our sex education system that a lot of men believe that condom is only a tool to avoid pregnancy, and since in gay sex, there are no reasons to worry about that, many men continue to avoid condom usage and fall prey to such diseases. Another contributing factor may be that it is easier to pass on the infection through anal sex, which is a major sexual activity among homosexual men, than vaginal intercourse due to the anal tissue being more fragile and prone to tearing.

The HIV virus can be transferred by various sexual activities and some other causes that may not be sexual at all, like blood transfusion, through pregnancy or by sharing of needles with an infected person. It is quite clear from the name that the HIV is a human virus, not a gay virus or a lesbian virus, which essentially means that it can affect heterosexuals as well. Any person indulging in unsafe sexual practices is at the risk of contracting the HIV virus, or for that matter, any other Sexually Transmitted Disease. Being homosexual does not necessarily put your child at any greater risk of AIDS and other STDs, than a heterosexual man with similar unsafe pattern of sexual behaviour. In fact, if homosexuality were to 'cause' AIDS, why are most gay men and women not infected by HIV at all?

As a parent, you can ensure that your child gets the correct knowledge about safe sex behaviour and condom use so that he is better protected and can continue to have a healthy sexual and romantic life. You can educate yourself about the same so that you can be in a better position to answer and resolve your child's questions and doubts about sex, or better yet, take him to an informed general health practitioner who can help both of you understand the risks and correct practices.

42. Why are gay men considered high-risk groups in the context of HIV transmission?

A 'high-risk group' is a medical term used for any group that shows a higher-than-expected risk for developing a particular disease, which may be defined on a measurable parameter—e.g., an inherited genetic defect, physical attribute, lifestyle, habit, socioeconomic and/or educational feature, as well as environment. It, however, does not mean that the parameters by themselves are a cause of the disease. For example, a research by the CDC (Centre for Disease Control and Prevention) has found certain racial groups like African Americans

to be at a higher risk for diabetes, but should that co-relation mean that being African American gives you diabetes?[16] The answer, of course, is no.

Similarly, gay men are considered a high-risk group for HIV transmissions because of a variety of cultural or social reasons. One of the major medical reasons, as discussed in the previous answer, is that it is easier to pass on the infection through anal sex than vaginal intercourse. Other reasons also include that gay men are a hard to reach population in terms of providing adequate health services and knowledge of safe sex behaviour because of the stigma and taboo that surrounds the topic of homosexuality. Having gay sex is considered a punishable offence under the law, making it even harder for gay men to seek medical assistance for sexual problems.

Even our sex education curriculum completely disregards modes of HIV transmission through homosexual sex. It still teaches adolescents that condoms are largely tools to avoid pregnancy and since there are no reasons to worry about that, many gay men continue to avoid condom usage and fall prey to such diseases. Gay men will continue to be a high-risk group for HIV and other STDs till there are enough social reforms that make it easier for them to seek medical help, and become better aware of the risks concerning HIV and other STDs.

43. Isn't there long-term damage that can be caused to the body due to anal sex?

Anal sex is not an exclusively homosexual sexual activity; besides, any sexual activity if done without proper care can cause damage to the body. Even heterosexual vaginal sex, if done roughly, can rupture the vaginal walls. Anal sex, if done with proper hygiene and lubrication, can be a sexually meaningful experience and will not cause any damage to the body.

A lot of times, we wonder whether anal sex is healthy because we feel that the sphincter was never intended for sexual purposes. We cannot assume to know what nature has intended because nature does not have intentions. The fact that people can safely have anal sex is enough to tell you that anal sex is safe when done correctly. Accounts of anal sex go back to the Kama Sutra that was written in the 2nd Century CE and are even seen in many temple sculptures of Khajuraho. The fact that we have continued to practice this sexual behaviour for centuries as human beings and not just homosexual men, it can be clearly seen that it is not a harmful activity.

You have to also understand that it is not necessary that every gay man must have anal sex. There are plenty of things that gay people can do to have a gratifying sexual life that does not include anal sex.

44. Why do so many gays/lesbians go through depression? Why are there a number of suicides in the community?

A recent review of data from dozens of studies concluded that there are no psychological tests that can distinguish between homosexual and heterosexual

psychological performance and there is no evidence of higher rates of emotional instability or psychiatric illness among homosexuals than among heterosexuals. [4] It is true that researchers have found homosexual people to be at a substantially higher risk for some forms of emotional problems, including suicidal tendency, major depression, and anxiety disorder [17]. This, however, is not because of homosexuality but because of the stigma and rejection that comes with being a homosexual.

Sometimes when a person is severely depressed, it may even lead him or her to consider or attempt suicide. The same researches, however, also find a correlation between social and personal acceptance of homosexuality and depression. It has been seen that LGBT individuals experiencing rejection from their family, friends or care givers as opposed to those who experience little to no rejection or even neutrality are eight times more likely to go through depression. Depression has also been linked to bullying or sexual or verbal harassment that the individual faces in his/her social environments like workplace or educational institutions. A staggering 90% of LGBT people have reported being bullied or harassed in their school or work environment because of their sexuality or gender expression.

Even if the individual is not out of the closet or open about his sexuality, the person may face institutionalised or internalised homophobia because of the general view of society or religion about homosexuality. There is a constant pressure on everyone to conform to societal norms or standards and more so on homosexuals. When one sees that homosexuality is being viewed in a negative light by family or friends, it deters them from being honest, and fear of rejection may make them anxious or depressed. Many youths also face depression because of inadequate information about their sexuality in formative years when they are coming to terms with their sexuality. They grow up believing they are abnormal and need to change; this thought that they are unacceptable sometimes drives them to suicide.

As parents and guardians to LGBT persons, you can ensure that your child does not undergo the same kind of trauma or depression as many others do. The more acceptance or understanding you will show towards your child, the less likely he/she will be to face depression or thoughts of suicide. You can also extend your support to them if you feel that they might be facing harassment at work or at their school environment. If the child feels he is cared for and looked after, he/she will be better able to deal with the struggles with sexuality, and have a more positive outlook on life.

Marriage

45. How will one find a partner for his old age? Will he/she die alone?

This fear also comes from the belief that sexual relationships are formed for the procreation of children only. In all relationships, the decision to have children is complex and needs great consideration. Although many heterosexuals decide to have children, many do not, or are unable to have children. On the other hand, many LGBT people do choose to have children or raise children with their partner. Children raised in these families comment that what is most important in a family is being loved and cared for.

46. Is marriage possible?

Firstly, let's understand marriage. Marriage is an institution between people that operates on 3 levels:

Personal
Social
Legal

As of now, in India, same sex marriage has no legal standing, that is to say that a gay couple will not be able to enjoy the same marriage rights that heterosexual couples do. However, what gay people can do is the ceremonious or social rituals around marriage in the eyes of their family or friends. The government will not be able to stop you from doing that. And although there have been cases where the Indian government has considered the validity of marriage of certain individuals who have been married in other nations where homosexual marriages are recognized, there is very little legal protection for same sex marriages within the Indian legal framework.

If, however, you choose to understand marriage as a personal and social ritual between individuals who love each other and wish to share it with their families and communities, then a marriage between two men or two women is very much a possibility if the two individuals choose to have it.

Indians, though, have never really looked towards the government to recognize or sanctify their marriages. Marriages have always been a social and personal affair. In pre-independence times, the British government had imposed a law that essentially nullified all marriages that were not registered with the government or were not performed in a church. Gandhi opposed this law because he believed the government had no right to tell people that their marriages were not acceptable.

Our culture has never looked towards any authority to validate their marriage. We also see many notable examples of unconventional marriages in Indian culture. One such example is of the village deity Aravaan in Koovagam, Tamil Nadu that is a festival that celebrates the marriage of mythological character Aravaan to a transgender person (Krishna avatar) and is celebrated over 18 days.

Our culture and mythology is filled with many such notable examples of marriages that are not between just a man and a woman, but are socially accepted and even celebrated.

47. Can't you marry a lesbian? And then both can have a secret life?

A marriage between people who are not sexually or emotionally attracted to each other is not a novel idea. Marriages of convenience have existed between heterosexuals as well and they are completely possible, but whether it is ethical or if it's something you want to indulge in, is a personal decision. Even if you were able to successfully manage to deceive society into believing your child is heterosexual because he/she is married, how long would you be able to carry on this pretense? Would you expect your children to compromise on a life of honesty and freedom for the rest of their lives, merely so that you can have an untainted image in society?

Firstly, marriage of your child should not be your decision. The decision to marry, whom to marry or whether to marry at all, should lie with your child. A marriage of convenience may not necessarily be a bad thing between consenting adults who understand what is required of them in such a marriage. A gay man might marry a lesbian woman if he feels that he can share a household with her and vice versa, but there might be many necessary sacrifices that would need to be made to keep up the façade. What would happen in the event that your child falls in love with a person of the same sex while being married? Would you rather ask your child to give up on a chance at happiness so that you can save face in society? And can you manage a bigger mess if children were to be involved?

A marriage between two people who may or may not be in love is still a completely personal matter and requires full closure to the people involved. It would be highly unethical for you to get your child married to someone who does not know the sexual orientation of your child. As long as all the people involved understand the risks and are willing to undertake those risks for the sake of a convenient life, it is not entirely wrong.

However, before you ask children to involve themselves in a marriage of convenience, you might want to understand the kind of message you are sending across to them. You will be telling them that who they are is so shameful to you that you are willing to sacrifice their freedom and a chance at happiness in lieu of your social standing. You are telling them that you would rather ask them to settle and compromise on a life of dishonesty than stand by them in the face of social oppression or adversity and support your decisions.

48. Does my son/daughter not want a family then? Will the children be gay?

The decision to have a child or not is a personal decision made by an individual or a couple and has nothing to do with their sexual orientation. There are just as many gay men and women who have parental instincts, as there are heterosexuals. Homosexual couples do not have the option of reproducing the conventional way but it doesn't, in any way, limit their options to become

parents if that is something they desire. There are plenty of options like surrogacy, adoption etc that are available to same sex parents or even single homosexual men and women who wish to raise children.

Being homosexual also does not mean that you do not have the correct parental instincts to be a good parent. There has been no evidence to suggest that having two same sex parents negatively affects the mental health or development of a child in any way. Research suggests that sexual identities (including gender identity, gender-role behaviour, and sexual orientation) develop in much the same way among children of lesbian mothers as they do among children of heterosexual parents.

In fact, there are many cases where children have grown up with only a single parent and not had any issues while growing up.



Bisexuality

49. Why can't he/she just marry a person of the opposite sex if he/she is bisexual?

To better understand this, try imagining a scenario. Consider a situation where you are about to marry the person you love and suddenly before your wedding, your parents decide to ask you to get married to another person. On questioning, they tell you that you shouldn't have an issue marrying another woman or man because they have the same gender as the person you were going to marry. Would you feel comfortable going ahead and marrying this other person? How would you feel being asked to even consider this as a proposal?

This is exactly what you are asking of your child. You are reducing the concept of love and the commitment of marriage to mere genitalia. We do not marry a person because of their gender; we marry a person for love, for their virtues and for the promise of happiness that we see with them. Bisexuals are often stigmatized further even within the gay community because sometimes gay men do come out first as bisexual because it seems less offensive to people, and then later declare themselves as homosexual. This does not mean that bisexuality is not a legitimate sexual orientation. On the spectrum of sexuality, bisexuals can fall anywhere on the continuum between the extremes of homosexuality and heterosexuality. The general assumption is that if one is bisexual, then they must be equally attracted to both sexes. This is generally not the case. Bisexuals can be attracted to both sexes in varying degrees; they can be more attracted to men than women or otherwise. One might even be bisexual in a way that they are more sexually attracted to men but more emotionally attracted to women and vice versa. It is impossible to quantify bisexuality and know how much we are attracted to each sex. One can only know that at any given point in time, how much we are attracted to a particular person.

We should allow bisexuals to choose for themselves who they are and whom they are attracted to. We should allow people to love without worrying about the genitals of the other person. Your son may end up marrying a person of the opposite sex if they truly find themselves drawn to them but if they end up being with someone of the same sex, then that should be okay too. You should be more concerned about how their lover treats them or how happy they make your child feel, and not about what gender they have.

50. Aren't bisexuals just going through a phase of confusion?

Confusion about sexuality is not something that is limited to bisexuals. Heterosexuals or homosexuals can also go through phases where they question their sexuality and this can be true for bisexuals as well. This, however, does not mean that bisexuality is a phase of confusion; it is a legitimate sexual orientation where a person is attracted to both sexes. The degree of this attraction may vary, some may be more attracted to women with a mild or slight attraction towards men and some might swing the other way. Confusion can sometimes arise precisely because of this.

Sexuality is a very diverse and complex topic and we have only recently started exploring the various possibilities of sexual attraction that exists. The only thing that we do know for sure is that whether one feels attracted or not is an experience that can only be understood by the person experiencing the attraction. We should stop labelling bisexuals as simply people who are confused or don't know how to choose and allow people to love and be with whomever they desire, without the fear of judgment or prejudice.

51. Can bisexuals be monogamous?

The capacity to be monogamous is a very personal one; it does not depend on your gender or sexuality. It will depend on your genetic make-up, your environment and your willingness or capacity to exercise your ability to be faithful in a relationship. If bisexuality were the sole reason why someone would cheat, then that should mean that people who are exclusively heterosexual or homosexual must not cheat at all.

Most people, irrespective of sexuality, cannot control whether they have desires for other people or not; what they can control is whether to choose to act on those desires. Bisexuals, just like heterosexuals and homosexuals, are bound to get tempted and it is completely up to them whether they are able to restrain themselves and not act on those desires.

So, yes, bisexuals are as capable of being monogamous as heterosexuals and homosexuals are; but whether they are successful at it is completely up to the individual.

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