

**To what extent do homosexuals experience prejudice and discrimination?**

The prejudice and discrimination directed toward homosexuals is known as “homophobia”. This anxiety and fear can lead to negative attitudes toward homosexuals and may even result in violence. For instance, in England 2 out of every 3 homosexual individuals, experience verbal or physical abuse. In Brazil, between 1997 and 2007, 2509 gay men were murdered due to their sexual orientation. Lesbian, gay and bisexual teenagers are believed to be 4 times more likely to commit suicide than their heterosexual peers.

**How can we overcome the prejudice and discrimination faced by homosexuals?**

Individuals with positive attitudes toward homosexuals usually state knowing at least one homosexual individual. This is why psychologists tend to believe that negative attitudes may not be a result of any negative incidents with a homosexual individual but may instead be a reflection of societal prejudice and stereotypes. One way to overcome prejudice and discrimination is to become more aware and conscious of the issues and experiences of homosexuality and correctly inform others.

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# Homosexuality & Sexual Orientation

## Gender & Sex

**Sex:** This is defined by an individual's biological characteristics such as having a penis, testis, vagina, uterus, etc. These characteristics anatomically differentiate a man from a woman.

**Gender:** This includes the behavioral characteristics and gender roles attributed to men and women according to that culture and time. In terms of behavioral characteristics these may include for instance a man being "macho" and a woman being "submissive" as for gender roles this may include only a man being referred to as the "bread winner" and woman as "house keeper." Gender characteristics may apply to a wide array of human behavior from hairstyles and clothes to speech and expression of emotions.

## Sexual Orientation

Refers to the emotional, romantic and sexual attraction between members of a sex. There are 3 types of sexual orientations:

- **Heterosexuality:** Attraction to members of the opposite sex.
- **Homosexuality:** Attraction to members of the same sex.
- **Bisexuality:** Attraction to members of both sexes.



## Frequently Asked Questions about Homosexuality

### Is sexual orientation a personal choice?

An individual's sexual orientation may develop even before having experienced any sexual relationship, during adolescence. Many people state unsuccessfully struggling to change their sexual desires for the same sex. Despite the prejudice, derogation, feelings of fear and anxiety over rejection from family and friends, one's sexual orientation can often not be denied and changed. It is for these reasons that psychologists do not view sexual orientation as a conscious choice that can be changed at will.

### Is homosexuality a mental illness or disorder?

No. Psychologists, psychiatrists and mental health professionals agree that homosexuality is not an illness, mental disorder or emotional problem. In 1973, after scientific research was conducted on the topic The American Psychiatric Association removed 'homosexuality' from the list of mental and emotional disorders and in 1975 The American Psychological Association followed. The main reason as to why homosexuality was referred to as a disorder was due to the fact that most homosexuals taking part in the scientific research of the time was those in therapy, part of a clinical population. Therefore, as more research was conducted with non-clinical populations, it was found that homosexuals lead healthy, well-adapted lives.

### Can sexual orientation be reversed by therapy?

No. Reversing sexual orientation from homosexual to heterosexual has no scientific basis, despite some individuals (or parental) attempts to do so. In 1990, The American Psychological Association stated that this type of reverse therapy had no scientifically proven success and may in fact create more harm than good. Reversing an individual's sexual orientation not only includes changing their sexuality but also changing their emotional, romantic and sexual feelings in addition to their social identity and sense of self.

### Why is it difficult for some homosexuals to "come out"?

Due to prejudice directed against homosexuals, "coming out" may often result into a difficult emotional experience. When homosexuals realize they are attracted to members of their own sex, they often state feelings of "loneliness" and being "different". They may also be afraid of being rejected or disowned by family, friends, colleagues or religious institutions. In addition, fear of becoming a victim of violence and discrimination. Research suggests that homosexuals experience a high degree of violence and discrimination.

