

# How Important Is Attention?

By Abigail Reinig



Abigail Reinig was born in Fort Lauderdale, Florida and then moved to Fort Myers, Florida when she was ten years old. While growing up, Abigail never really gave it much thought about people being gay, lesbian or bisexual. Now that she is in high school and around people with different sexual preferences every day she has become more aware of how popular it is to be “homosexual.” Now, more frequently it has become the new norm to be gay, lesbian, or bisexual and very open about these lifestyles. In her essay she talks about being around homosexuals and how it seems to be the new cool thing.



A few years ago I could never imagine going to a high school where many of my peers are gay, lesbian, or bisexual or even that the other students would be so open about their sexuality. Understanding what would make a person attracted to the same sex is a difficult concept to grasp. Trying to make sense of why people are the way they are warrants some deep reflection about our society, families, and relationships. What makes people who and what they are? The theoretical perspective, which is a set of assumptions about an area of study, most related to this cultural norm and the effect on society is the conflict perspective. The conflict perspective emphasizes conflict, competition, change and constraint within a society (qtd. in Giddens). When trying to learn more about alternative lifestyles, much of the research points to the conflict that people have when they essentially try to explain or live in our heterosexual society as a homosexual. Further, the symbolic interactionism theory which emphasizes and focuses on the interactions among people based on mutually understood symbols (Shepard & Greene 30), also is relevant to my life experience and my social norm as it relates to understanding why someone is gay, lesbian, or bisexual in a society that defines family and marriage in a conventional heterosexual manner. For example: a traditional wedding ceremony is for a male and female to unite in the holy matrimony, not for two men or two women. As a child, we are socialized to believe that a family is made up of a mother and father, not two mothers or two fathers.

One of the first experiences that I encountered was with one of my best friends from middle school. My friend's mom became a lesbian after she divorced her husband and began living with another woman. She was married to this man for a long time and had three children with him. According to my friend, her mom decided one day she would rather become lesbian because she said that she was tired of men. This was a weird situation for me to deal with because I loved hanging out with my best friend and her parents. Now, each time I was invited to hang out with my friend, I was around all of her mom's gay and lesbian friends. I remember this situation as very awkward for my friend, as well as for me. Every time I went somewhere with her it was just a little strange because no one ever really explained it to me, how could someone be straight at one point in their life then become gay, lesbian, or bisexual later in life?

I have been enlightened about a couple things being in school around people that consider themselves gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Most people that are open and comfortable with talking about their sexuality seem to be doing it just for the attention, whether it is negative or positive attention. For example, one boy that I encounter daily seems to find a way to slip into our conversations that he is bisexual. I have had many conversations with his boy and I already clearly know his sexual preference. I wonder why he feels the need to keep reminding me. Degges-White, Rice & Myers (2000) explains Cass' Theory which seems to address the stages of development of sexual identity. The fifth stage of the Cass' Theory is the "identity pride." This stage is where "a nearly complete acceptance of one's gay, lesbian or bisexual self, coupled with an acute awareness of the rejection of homosexuals by society." The stage is where many individuals are strong in their commitment to the homosexual group and actually it becomes their primary identity. This may clearly explain the many strange comments he has made and gives me reason to think that he is doing it purely for attention and reaffirmation of who he strongly identifies with. There are others that are actually gay, lesbian or bisexual and they never say a word about it. Most of the students that are not doing it for attention will never tell anyone about their sexuality. Perhaps they have not reached the fifth stage of Cass' Theory at this point in their lives.

According to Bennett (2000) "social attitudes toward and "expert" judgments about gays and lesbians have changed dramatically – and news coverage about gays and lesbians has to some extent mirrored these

changing attitudes and judgments.” As more news coverage about the nationwide gay and lesbian movement takes place, it becomes more of a cultural norm. Most of the controversy in the news these days covers basic civil rights including freedom from discrimination in housing and employment. Also, it includes civil rights for gays and lesbians to enter into a legal marriage and allow for parenting rights that are recognized by the state.

To define a homophobe, which is “having irrational hatred of homosexuality” does not describe me in any manner. Supporting gay rights is sort of the same as believing that all people have the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. I believe everyone deserves to be happy no matter what. In my opinion, it just seems like it’s the new trend to be openly gay. Not discreet or “in the closet” as it was in the past. Somehow, it has become so commonplace in our society that no one has any reservations about living in the mainstream of society.

In conversation with an older gay man that I met, he relayed how he had lived through the years of it not being cool to be gay or be anything other than heterosexual “Being gay used to be an exclusive club but now we let anyone in.” John said. Even John, a sixty three year old gay man has noticed that it is the new norm to be gay; it is the “new trend” as John would say. In response to the experience of an older gay man, the youth of today are not encountering the lack of social support from the gay, lesbian, and bisexual community. As stated by Boschert (2002) they have more information, more tolerance to homosexuality in general; therefore today’s youth have greater freedom and willingness to disclose their sexual identity and also may seem to have friends with more positive attitudes and understanding about same sex orientation. Possibly, these factors are contributing to the culture in my high school and community.

There are countless studies that state being homosexual is a choice. Additionally there are countless numbers of studies contradicting this by saying that it’s the way that you were born. I believe a person is born with certain sexual tendencies, but I also believe that a person’s surroundings, upbringing, and lifestyle can affect a person’s sexual preference. What has been learned from this brief study on this topic is that we should accept individuals for who they are as a person and not deny or stop them from the right to pursue their civil liberty and their happiness.

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