

Interacting with and Misconceptions About LGBT (Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender) People

By Stan Kimer



Expert Forum

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Are you and your enterprise ready for LGBT Pride Month this year?

There is often discussion around the business case for embracing and executing LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) diversity initiatives as we near LGBT Pride Month each June. We frequently talk about reaching the \$700B+ LGBT market in the US as well as recruiting and retaining the best employees. But this year I want to add a little bit of fun to the discussion and summarize my two most read blogs since I started my consulting practice in 2010.

The first of these two “lists” were on interacting with LGBT people and titled “Five Things Never to Say to Gay People”

1. Referring to my sexual orientation as my sexual preference or as my lifestyle. Being gay is who I am, not a preference I chose. It is at the core of my being. Always use the correct term “sexual orientation.”
2. Calling my spouse or “significant other” my pal or my room-mate, and therefore minimalizing or insulting my 21-year committed relationship. In fact now in several states and DC, same gender partners can legally marry, so even husband or wife may be the preferred terms. Best action is to always ask your gay friend how they like their life partner referred as.
3. Using certain charged words like queer, dyke or faggot unless you have built a level of trust or closeness with me.
4. Giving me that platitude that you “love me, you love the sinner but hate the sin” and you assume that all LGBT people are faithless heathens. First, I do not agree that being gay is a sin – it is the way God made me. And second, there are many LGBT people of deep faith and many churches that are totally affirming of LGBT people.
5. Attributing broad societal issues such as AIDS or child molestation to the gay community. AIDS is a human disease, not a gay disease. More heterosexual people are now infected with the HIV virus than gay people. And the occurrence of child molestation among heterosexual and the gay population is proportionate to the population.

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One other point to address. Being a gay man does not mean that I secretly wanted to be a woman, and a lesbian does not secretly want to be a man. Sexual orientation refers to the gender of the person I am attracted to; heterosexuals are attracted to people of the opposite gender, gays and lesbians are attracted to people of their own gender, and bisexuals are attracted to people of both genders. When a person feels they are not living within their current biological gender (such as Chas Bono), that falls under the transgender, or gender identity, umbrella. [Click here to connect to a longer article on transgenderism](#) here on the Workforce Diversity Network which I recently authored.

Bottom line summary – the best bet in interacting with LGBT people is to all be respectful and not afraid to ask questions.

The second “list of 5” is my “common misconceptions about gay people.”

1. It’s a “white person’s thing.” The one cool thing about the LGBT community is that it intersects with every race, culture, country. Didn’t we all gasp when the president of Iran told an Ivy League audience “we don’t have gay people in Iran.” ([Link to article](#)) Perhaps there is some “inherent racial prejudice” with the LGBT community and we in leadership need to be very proactive and vigilant to assure our whole community are represented and are at the table.

2. Gay people don’t have kids. The demographics are continually shifting and more and more same gender couple are having children via natural childbirth methods as well as adoption. Also many gay people have children in earlier marriages before coming out as gay. FACT: the percentage of same-gender household raising children increased from 17% in the 2000 US Census to 25% in 2010! ([Link to ABC news article](#))

3. All gay people think about is sex – sex – sex. Maybe it just seems that way because many LGBT people may not have as many hang ups as other people about sexuality. Seriously, gay people also think about work, finances, hobbies, their communities and family... which brings us to:

4. If I am straight, my gay friends all want to make a pass at me. Most LGBT people are sensible enough to realize that their straight friends are not going to be interested sexually in them, plus why would we want to ruin a good friendship? Finally, don’t flatter yourself and assume you are your gay’s friend’s type anyway. Many gay people are very picky. (Smile)

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5. All gay men are feminine (and drag queens) and all lesbians are masculine. Not true. Even though LGBT people are often fine with exhibiting both their masculine and feminine sides, there is a wide range of gender expression across the LGBT community. NOTE: it is very dangerous to jump to conclusions about someone's sexual orientation based on their feminine or masculine qualities. Also this stereotyping is particular dangerous to our young people – we do not need gay male teens thinking the only careers for them are hair stylists and interior decorators, and all lesbian teens thinking they need to be truck drivers or mechanics. Please, no offense meant to hair stylists, interior designers and truck drives – LGBT people make great ones!)

Feel free to engage [Total Engagement Consulting by Kimer](#) for workshops or presentations for your enterprise, especially if you are looking for something special this June for LGBT Pride Month!