

Ten Ways that Thoughtful, Good-hearted People Disagree about Sexual Orientation & LGBT Rights

From Furious to Curious

A New Dialogue Sparking Series from the Village Square¹



1. How biological is sexual orientation and how malleable is that biology?

- Sexual orientation is largely biological—in a way that doesn't significantly change over time. Although environmental influences may shape development, their impact is secondary to the innate biology.
- Sexual orientation is partially biological, with environmental factors playing a significant role over time. To some degree, there are real shifts in orientation that can occur based on context and/or over time.

2. For those who are attracted to others of the same sex, what does (or should) it mean for identity?

- If you're attracted to the same sex, that is who you are. The big question is whether you will be supported in living true to this self and expressing this sexuality in a same-sex relationship. The only other option is denying and suppressing who you really are.
- If you're attracted to the same sex, that is a meaningful and legitimate aspect of your life experience. Whether or not it defines you as 'who you are' is the big question. It is possible to acknowledge (and not suppress) one's same sex attraction, but without identifying with it fundamental to your identity.

3. Should the changes happening in society in relation to LGBT rights be celebrated?

- The legal changes in the U.S. and elsewhere are something to celebrate! They are positive advancements in rights and civil society to be welcomed as improving society overall.
- While there are definitely positive changes happening in terms of basic empathy and respect, others are concerning. The message and patterns they introduce into society will lead to unanticipated negative consequences in the future.

4. Is the civil rights movement in the 60's an ideal metaphor for what is unfolding?

- Yes! This is absolutely the new civil rights movement—and the next stage in respect, rights and freedom for all.
- Not quite. Although the metaphor is almost unquestioned, there are limits to it—especially in relation to how dissenters are seen. Equality, justice and rights can be understood in very different ways. Other metaphors, such as Palestinian/Jewish co-existence, may be more fitting.

¹ *The intention is to fairly "map out" both key questions and the associated responses - drawing upon the strongest arguments, in the simplest and most objective language possible. The attempt here is to represent fairly the most reasonable and nuanced perspectives on both sides - in a way that would be recognizable to each side - 'yes, that's it!')*

5. How are we to make sense of past and current distress in the LGBT community—including suicides?

- Primary responsibility for this distress lies with those who don't fully accept the LGBT community—including religious organizations who propagate a doctrine that leads same-sex attracted adherents to self-hatred and loathing.
- The factors contributing to this distress are complex and multi-faceted. To attribute an event like suicide solely to religious teaching is both to ignore numerous other possible factors—and to mischaracterize the intentions and messages of most religious teachers.

6. Is this really as simple as learning to love and accept people?

- Yes! Why can't people just do that??
- Not quite. There are different ways to understand love and acceptance that aren't always acknowledged. Real love and acceptance of others doesn't mean selling out or compromising one's beliefs.

7. How should we treat religious people, including those who don't identify as gay—but instead, as SSA or who choose not to label their sexuality?

- This path is a reflection of inner homophobia—and dangerous to promote or highlight in any way. A better path would be to relegate and shame this option so people see it for what it is—both inherently harmful and harmful for the larger message it sends society.
- This is a legitimate path that deserves the same respect as other choices in relation to sexuality. For those seeking healthy ways to address their sexuality and experience congruence between their sexual and spiritual identities, this option deserves attention as an option people can consider.

8. What does it mean to be anti-gay and homophobic?

- This refers to someone who believes gay people are anything less than entirely equal and completely acceptable in their identity and life experience.
- This refers not to someone who simply disagrees with another's view of identity, but rather someone who is openly and overtly hostile to these individuals. Any broader definition pathologies Christianity or other religious or spiritual traditions that proscribe same-sex sexual relations.

9. How has religion influenced this conversation?

- The influence of religion on this conversation has largely been negative—acting as a driver and center of prejudice. LGBT members of conservative religions (who would be miserable in heterosexual relationships) are given only one option in how to relate to their sexuality: celibacy.
- Religion has been cast unfairly as a bully—ignoring the teachings of compassion, love, respect and non-judgment that pervade many faiths. Although some who experience same-sex attraction do not find it possible to pursue a heterosexual relationship, some do—and find great happiness in these family relationships. There are others for whom celibacy is a commitment they are willing to make in order to feel peace within their spiritual beliefs and values.

10. Is it okay to disagree about these questions?

- Compared to other questions, these have a direct impact on the well-being of a community. Those who disagree and promote conservative religious doctrines are creating an unwelcoming and unsafe environment for those who identify as LGBT. What's more, the moral and scientific case is so clear

that it should not be tolerated. For this reason, those who dissent should be treated like those who fought against black civil rights.

- Although these questions clearly have an impact on those who experience same-sex attraction, both sides make strong arguments (with their own research) that their perspective will produce the most happiness. The science is neither settled nor obviously clear. Rather than attempting to shame or relegate dissenters to the fringe of society, they deserve to be welcomed in an important, ongoing conversation in this country.