

MYTHS AROUND BEING LGBTQ: IS THIS A MENTAL ILLNESS? CAN I BE CURED?

For many years homosexuality was considered a mental illness, and treated like other mental illnesses with counselling and sometimes institutionalism. As a society we no longer hold this outdated and homophobic viewpoint.

WHAT CAUSES PEOPLE TO BE LGBTQ?

Based on good research and science, it is still not clear why some people are LGBTQ, but it is clear this is a personal story for each person, and an interplay of genetic, hormonal, developmental social and cultural factors.

Most LGBTQ people do not feel they "choose" their sexual preference. There are many theories of what "causes" people to be attracted to other members of the same sex. Some of the theories favoured by those promoting "straight therapies" are that gay people have avoidant and unemotionally available fathers, over involved mothers, experiences of abuse or other traumatic events as a child, or extreme loneliness.

While some of these issues may be found in some LGBTQ people, it is important to note that studies which support these theories are not considered academically rigorous. They are often instead anecdotal stories of small groups of people.

CAN I BE CURED?

Straight camps and other reparative therapies have not been shown to work, and come from a core belief that there is a problem to be "cured".

The Australia Psychological Society have distanced themselves from any therapies which attempt to change sexual orientation, due to fears these promote LGBTQ people as mentally ill, and promote prejudice.

There are no scientifically rigorous studies showing that these therapies work, the arguments are instead based on personal stories and testimonies. Psychologists in Australia are encouraged to "refrain from attempts to change individual's sexual orientation".

The term "counsellor" is not regulated so some people still conduct this kind of therapy, often damaging and shaming.

LGBTQ AS A MENTAL ILLNESS

Mental illnesses are diagnosed by psychologists and psychiatrists using a manual called the Diagnostic and Statistics Manual, which contains the criteria required to be met to receive a particular diagnosis.

The first one was published in 1952, and has been revised several times since then, with diagnoses often disappearing as scientific understanding progresses.

Homosexuality used to be diagnosed as a mental illness. Fortunately this is no longer the case! In 1975 "Sexual orientation disturbance (Homosexuality)" was removed from this manual, thereby recognizing homosexuality as one form of normal sexual behaviour, and not an illness.

SUMMARY

Homosexuality has not been considered a mental illness since 1975.

There are various theories about why some people are LGBTQ, no-one is sure. However most people do not "choose" to be LGBTQ.

There is no good evidence that straight camps work. In fact they can be very damaging.

SOME RESOURCES

The Australian Psychological Society
psychology.org.au