

One

Religious Views of Same-Sex Attraction

*A*dvances for lesbian and gay people have occurred in the United States in the form of antidiscrimination laws, elimination of all sodomy laws, making hate crimes against lesbian and gay people a crime, and legalization of civil unions and marriage in some states. But this secular progress is not matched in heterosexist religious arenas. As stated by Yip (2007), lesbian and gay issues are still contentious.

Heterosexism pervades our culture and beliefs. Herek (1995) defined it as “the ideological system that denies, denigrates, and stigmatizes any nonheterosexual form of behavior, identity, relationship, or community” (p. 321). It dismisses and stigmatizes anyone who does not comply with heterosexual norms. Heterosexism operates at two levels: cultural and individual. Cultural heterosexism is so pervasive that we may not notice it until something comes along like the gay marriage issue. Many people have risen up against gay marriage and called for the passing of laws to prevent it or, in some states, overturning of laws that support it. They believe that marriage can only happen between a woman and a man. Almost any time a legal move takes place that is favorable to lesbian and gay people, a backlash of negative commentary develops and moves start up to have the favorable laws overturned. So progress is made but also upended by those who oppose this progress. Another example of cultural heterosexism took place when, in 2005, an Alabama

state representative proposed a bill to strip public libraries of books by lesbian or gay authors, promising to dig a hole in the ground, dump the books in it, and bury them (Burr, 2009). The bill failed to pass.

Because of the pervasiveness of cultural heterosexism, it is not surprising to see it also manifested at the individual level in feelings and behaviors. This can range from jokes and derogatory language to violence (Herek, 1995). At this level, lesbian and gay people have to contend with stigma, prejudice, discrimination, and sometimes violence and death. It also affects the coming-out process and decisions about whether or not to disclose one's sexual identity to others. As an example, in 1999, gay partners ages 50 and 40 were brutally murdered while asleep in their bed by two white supremacist brothers in Redding, California. They claimed they were carrying out God's will (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2001; Violence Against LGBT People, n.d.). This is just one example of many murders of lesbian and gay people.

Yep (2002) described four categories of heterosexism, based on whether the prejudice is interior or exterior and individual or collective. *Interior-individual* or internalized heterosexism occurs when people learn at a young age that being lesbian or gay is considered shameful and is stigmatized as deviant, immoral, and deficient, that lesbian and gay people are outcasts, and that something is wrong with them. The stigmatization, which can be learned from many sources such as family, friends, teachers, and the mass media, becomes internalized.

Exterior-individual or externalized heterosexism happens when lesbian and gay people are subjected to verbal abuse, avoidance, discrimination, and physical violence.

Interior-collective heterosexism, or discursive violence, occurs when lesbian and gay people are treated and talked about differently from heterosexuals in order to degrade and pathologize them. This can include not only words but also tones and gestures. People sometimes ask questions that would hardly ever be asked of heterosexuals, such as: What do lesbians do in bed? Are you the man or the woman in your relationship?

Exterior-collective heterosexism can also be thought of as institutional violence. Heterosexist thinking is deeply ingrained in our social and collective consciousness. Heterosexuals are normalized while lesbian and gay people are disadvantaged and disempowered. Few employers, for example, provide benefits to domestic partners, while their availability for heterosexual couples is taken for granted. All four types of heterosexism are psychological violence or, as Yep (2002) put it, soul murder.

Interior-individual heterosexism affects everyone, as heterosexism is internalized in all of us. A strong religious commitment has been shown to predict internalized heterosexism in both heterosexuals and lesbian and gay people (Herek, 1987). Research studies have overwhelmingly found that people with

conservative or fundamentalist religious beliefs are especially likely to hold anti-gay attitudes (Altemeyer, 2003b; Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992; Batson, Floyd, Meyer, & Winner, 1999; Burdette, Ellison, & Hill, 2005; Duck & Hunsberger, 1999; R. D. Fisher, Derison, Polley, Cadman, & Johnston, 1994; Herek, 1987; Hunsberger, 1996; Hunsberger & Jackson, 2005; Veenlief & Esses, 2007; Wilkinson, 2004; Wilkinson & Roys, 2005). Heterosexist messages are often delivered in churches (Ream, 2001). The outcome is that people develop negative attitudes about same-sex attractions and the people who experience them.

Lesbian and gay people internalize heterosexism and develop negative attitudes about themselves (Meyer & Dean, 1998; Otis and Skinner, 1996; Ross and Rosser, 1996; Wagner, Brandolo, & Rabkhi, 1996). High levels of internalized heterosexism have negative outcomes for lesbian and gay people. They experience decreased levels of self-acceptance and self-esteem along with shame and self-hatred (Purcell, Camos, & Perrilla, 1996). They can also experience depression, demoralization, guilt, fear, suicidal ideation and behavior, sexual dysfunction, lessening of involvement in intimate relationships, expectations of rejection by others, isolation, lack of connection to the lesbian and gay community, drug or alcohol abuse, and limited aspirations (Boatwright, Gilbert, Forrest, & Ketzenberger, 1996; Harris, Cook, & Kashubeck-West, 2008; Kus, 1992; Meyer and Dean, 1998; Otis and Skinner, 1996; Shidlo & Schroeder, 2002; Wagner et al., 1996). In addition, they accept negative myths about themselves (Boatwright et al., 1996; Meyer and Dean, 1998; Otis and Skinner, 1996; Wagner et al., 1996), such as that they are abnormal, pathological, perverted, shameful, and evil.

Internalized heterosexism in lesbian and gay people can be overt or covert. Overt expression includes depreciation of oneself as inferior or deviant. People may not seek support because they think they do not deserve it. Covert forms are more common. People may appear to accept themselves and their sexual identity but act in ways that sabotage themselves. For example, they may abandon educational or career plans, or they may tolerate abusive behavior from others. They may also set themselves up for rejection with impulsive disclosures in situations in which people are likely to react with hostility (Gonsiorek, 1993).

Religious Views of Same-Sex Attraction

An interchange exists between heterosexism and conservative religion. Heterosexist religions create the sin of being lesbian or gay. Judgmental words they associate with sin include *damnation, penance, iniquity, and transgression* (Burr, 2009). Nugent and Gramick (1989) identified various religious views about lesbian and gay people, and several of these views are tied to sin. The views presented

here range from the most negative to the most positive, but few are positive. The religious views are categorized as rejecting-punitive, rejecting-nonpunitive, qualified acceptance, and full acceptance.

Rejecting-Punitive

The majority of mainline Protestant, Catholic, Islamic, and Judaic traditions strictly prohibit same-sex relations and consider them sinful, immoral, and evil (Clark, Brown, & Hochstein, 1990; Melton, 1991). This view is one of the strongest sources of heterosexist rhetoric in the United States and around the world. In Christian churches, it relies heavily on Biblical texts that are thought to condemn same-sex relations. Some fundamentalists with this view endorse the death penalty for lesbian and gay people. The author heard the president of a U.S. fundamentalist college say on a radio program that lesbian and gay people should be stoned to death and for no other reason than their sexual orientation. The response of this religious view to lesbian and gay people throughout history included, as punishment or cures for same-sex relations, stoning, burning, imprisonment, banishment, torture, and sexual mutilation (Nugent & Gramick, 1989). In more modern times, refusal to be cured or turned into a heterosexual can result in being expelled from one's church and often from one's family. In this view, the only way lesbian and gay people can be saved is to renounce their same-sex relations and experience a religious conversion to heterosexuality. This is based on the assumption that being lesbian or gay is a choice and that one can change one's sexual orientation. This view also teaches that God does not love same-sex-attracted people who cannot or will not change. Added as a motivator is the threat that being lesbian or gay is punishable by an eternity in hell (Greenberg & Bystryn, 1982).

Rejecting-Nonpunitive

This view rejects same-sex attractions and behavior but not the person. It advocates the position "love the sinner, hate the sin" (Lease, Horne, & Noffsinger-Frazier, 2005). This was the view taught by Saint Augustine. Conservative religious people follow this principle when they claim that they accept lesbian and gay people but not their sexual behavior. But can one distinguish between a behavior and the person who carries it out (Batson et al., 1999)? Wilkinson and Roys (2005) conducted a study with 171 college students (58 men, 113 women) to determine if they could distinguish between same-sex behavior, fantasies, and emotions. They found that lesbian and gay people were rated more negatively when they were described as engaging in sexual behavior than when they were described as only having sexual fantasies or feelings. The behavior of having sex was viewed as sinful.

This view entails a negative prejudicial judgment against lesbian and gay people (Bassett et al., 2001). Those with this view are attempting to be affirmative while at the same time they are prejudiced. They say they accept lesbian and gay people but not one of the core parts of their sexual orientation, having sex with a person of the same sex (A. R. Fisher & DeBord, 2007). Churches that hold this view tell gay and lesbian people to go through a conversion or reorientation to heterosexuality or live a life of sexual abstinence (Bassett et al., 2001).

Qualified Acceptance

This view considers heterosexual identity to be the ideal and same-sex sexual identity to be inferior. Same-sex behavior is considered imperfect and incomplete, but lesbian and gay people are not seen as immoral, sinful, or evil. This position also asserts that lesbian and gay people do not choose their sexual orientation and cannot change it (Nugent & Gramick, 1989). Same-sex relations are not forbidden by this view, but they are also not embraced (Barret & Barzan, 1966; Dworkin, 1997).

Full Acceptance

This view proclaims that same-sex attractions are equal to heterosexual attractions, natural, and part of the divine plan of creation. Sexuality is to be evaluated by the quality of the relationships of those involved, regardless of their genders (Nugent & Gramick, 1989).

The Predominant Rejecting-Punitive Religious View

All of the views identified above, except full acceptance, can be troubling to lesbian and gay people. But the rejecting-punitive view is the most difficult one to cope with and is central in this book. Many believe that this religious view contributes strongly to internalized heterosexism and rejection of oneself as lesbian or gay (Gage Davidson, 2000; Haldeman, 1998; Wood, 2000).

The rejecting-punitive view is represented by most major religious denominations. Those who identify as lesbian and gay have been rejected by nearly every major religious denomination in the United States. Only a few of the more than 2,500 religious denominations in the United States affirm lesbian and gay people (Sherkat, 2002).

Evangelical and fundamentalist groups also hold the rejecting-punitive religious view. Evangelicalism developed out of the Protestant revivals that took place in the United States in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Groups such as Southern Baptists, Catholic charismatics, Pentecostals, and Mennonites are examples of evangelical religions. Evangelicals hold that the Bible is the sole source of religious authority. They believe in the inerrancy of the Bible, the authenticity of Jesus's miracles, and the virgin birth of Jesus. Fundamentalists are a subset of evangelicalism (Kahn, 2006). Fundamentalism today is traceable to the 1840s with the local growth of revivalism. It holds that only one religion, evangelicalism, has the inerrant truth (Hunsberger, 1996). Those high in strong religious fundamentalism had strong early training in identifying with their religion. The early emphasis on family religion may be accompanied with "us versus them" mentality that leads to discrimination (Altemeyer, 2003b).

The rise of American fundamentalism was associated with rejection of Darwinian ideas of evolution and historical and critical studies of Biblical texts at the end of the nineteenth century. The intellectual advances of Western culture were shut out of their churches, and this has not changed. Fundamentalists believe that every word in the Bible came directly from God. Inerrancy was a code word (Marsden, 2006) for their belief that the Bible is literally true: "God cannot make any mistakes" (Houts, 2009, p. 284). In addition to being antimodern, other aspects of fundamentalism include opposition to progressive liberal political reform, communism, and foreign policy involvement. They oppose psychology because of its acceptance of sexual freedom and "homosexuals." They also think that individual believers can understand Biblical truths (Houts, 2009).

The author knows of a conservative Baptist school of theology in which the staff rewrote the NASW *Code of Ethics* to conform to their orthodoxy. Statements they thought were too progressive, including everything related to same-sex sexual orientation, were deleted. These statements did not fit with their view of religious truth.

Authority for the rejection-punitive view is external, derived from scripture, religious leaders, creeds, and canons (Buchanan, Dzelme, Harris, & Hecker, 2001). Religious truths must be followed, and church members must comply with unchangeable religious practices (Altemeyer and Hunsberger, 1992; Paloutzian, 1996). Evangelical and fundamentalist Christians rely on the Bible as a guide to living (Noll, 1992). Religion is looked to for decision making (Deutsch, Coleman, & Marcus, 2006) and directions in life. Religious leaders and congregations also give instructions on everything including appropriate sexual activity (D. L. Levy, 2008). Instruction to lesbian and gay people typically includes three choices: repentance and conversion, celibacy, or heterosexual marriage (Ritter & O'Neill, 1998).

Those holding the rejecting-punitive view, including evangelical and fundamentalist Christians, believe that one set of religious teachings contains the

fundamental, essential, and inerrant truth about humanity and the deity (Pargament, 1997). They also believe that the Bible is a literal transcription of ultimate truth or the word of God (Hogge & Friedman, 1967). Taylor (2000) found that the belief that the Bible should be taken literally was the strongest predictor of negative attitudes toward lesbian and gay people.

Duck and Hunsberger (1999) found that authoritarianism (rigid traditional attitudes) and intrinsic religiosity (internally motivated) had the strongest relationships with prejudice. Religious fundamentalism has in its structure authoritarianism, discrimination, and hostility toward lesbian and gay people (Duck & Hunsberger, 1999; Hunsberger, 1996).

Religious fundamentalists have been characterized as closed-minded and unwilling to question their beliefs or consider other points of view (English, 1996; Hunsberger, Pratt, & Prancer, 1994; Schwartz & Lindley, 2005). The rejecting-punitive view brings with it lowered levels of understanding and acceptance of beliefs and values that are different from its perceived morally superior view (Friedman & Downey, 1994). Religious groups that interpret scripture with a greater emphasis on historical context and that allow for variations in interpretation report less prejudice and discrimination against lesbian and gay people (Nelson, 1982; Nungesser, 1983).

Rejecting-punitive religious teachings and doctrines have also been used to discriminate against other groups. Churches with this view support a patriarchal culture in which women occupy second-class status. The Bible and other religious texts have also been used to support miscegenation laws, racial segregation, the Holocaust, slavery, and genocide among Native Americans. Every group that has practiced genocide against another group did so out of a valutative framework, often religiously based (Greene, 2007). Most of the groups justified their behavior as coming from a religious mandate, and they often received popular support. This continues to be true for lesbian and gay people. Believers hold to the view that they are upholding a moral order sanctioned by religious tradition and divine authority, and they rationalize their treatment of lesbian and gay people in these moralistic terms (Yip, 2003).

The rejecting-punitive view finds support in several Bible verses (quotations that follow are from the King James version). The most often quoted is the story of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:1–8, 10–13). Two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening. Lot, who was sitting in the gateway of the city, saw them. He got up to meet them and bowed down. “My lords,” he said, “please turn aside to your servant’s house. You can wash your feet and spend the night and then go on your way early in the morning.” “No,” they answered, “we will spend the night in the square.” But he insisted so strongly that they went with him and entered his house. He prepared a meal for them.

Before they went to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom—both young and old—surrounded the house. They called to Lot, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them.” Lot went outside to meet them and shut the door behind him and said, “No, my friends. Don’t do this wicked thing. Look, I have two daughters who have never slept with a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do what you like with them. But don’t do anything to these men, for they have come under the protection of my room.” The men inside reached out and pulled Lot back into the house and shut the door. Then they struck the men who were at the door of the house with blindness so that they could not find the door. The two men said to Lot, “Do you have anyone else here—sons-in-law, sons, or daughters, or anyone else in the city who belongs to you? Get them out of here, because we are going to destroy this place. The outcry to the Lord against its people in this city is so great that He has sent us to destroy it.”

Many Christians believe that God destroyed the city of Sodom due to the sin of “homosexuality.” However, other verses in the Bible referring to this story (Ezekiel 16:49; Luke 10:10–12, 17:28–29; and Mathew 10:14–15) explain that the sins of the city were actually inhospitality, haughtiness and arrogance, and lack of concern for the poor (Boswell, 1980).

Leviticus 18:22 instructs men: “Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable.” Leviticus 20:13 says that “if a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads.” These two verses are part of the Levitical Code or rules for living. But many view this code as outdated. In addition to prohibiting male-to-male sexual contact, it includes other prohibitions such as the following:

- ✿ Leviticus 11:6–10: One is forbidden to eat rabbit, pork, lobster, shrimp, or clams.
- ✿ Leviticus 12:2: If a woman bears a son, she is unclean for seven days; after bearing a daughter, she is unclean for 14 days.
- ✿ Leviticus 20:18: Any husband who sees his naked wife during the time she is menstruating must be ostracized.

While most of these prohibitions are no longer considered relevant, many religious leaders still speak about the prohibition against same-sex acts. This is a manifestation of heterosexism (D. R. Morrow & Tyson, 2006). Most Christians do not follow any of the other Levitical laws, so it is hypocritical to apply one of these laws to gay people (Wilcox, 2003).

First Corinthians 6:9–10 states, “Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral

nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders...will inherit the kingdom of God." And Timothy 1:9–10 says, "We also know that law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious...homosexuals."

Most books of the New Testament, including the Gospels, do not address same-sex acts. Paul is the only New Testament writer to do so. The two passages above were written by Paul.

Romans 1:26–27 states:

God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.

This is another passage written by Paul. The problem here is that we only have Paul's answer and do not know the question or situation. He may have responded to idolatry and pagan rites that honor false gods. Since no one studied "homosexuals" as a distinct group until the twentieth century, it may have been that Paul was not discussing sexual minorities but same-sex acts carried out by heterosexuals with temple prostitutes (Burr, 2009).

Burr (2009) identified seven issues to consider when thinking about a Biblical view of "homosexuality":

1. There are no teachings on "homosexuality" in the Bible. Jesus never mentioned it in the four gospels.
2. "Homosexual" behavior is never the main focus of a text. It is mentioned in a discussion of something else such as attempted rape, idolatry, or purity codes. The meaning and context of these texts is difficult to discern.
3. Biblical authors did not understand "homosexual" orientation. Social science did not understand sexual orientation until midway through the 20th century.
4. Jesus embraced two sexual minorities. He welcomed prostitutes and eunuchs, men who could not perform sexually or had been castrated, and said they would enter the Kingdom of Heaven and attain full salvation.

5. Literal application of scriptures to contemporary moral issues can lead to terrible consequences. Slavery is an example.
6. Jesus and the writings of the early church condemn being judgmental (Matthew 7:1–5; Romans 2:1, 14:4–13). The church and society are judgmental of lesbian and gay people and cruel to them. Jesus advocated love.
7. There is no single sexual ethic in the Bible.

The Bible as we know it today did not come into existence until the fourth century. In 1546 at the Council of Trent, Catholic Church leaders voted to accept the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments as authoritative. The list of scriptures that the church considered to be inspired came to be called the canon. Its selection was the result of a long process of deciding which of the books that had been circulating for a long time were to be regarded as authoritative and inspired. Books were chosen by general consensus of church leaders (Houts, 2009). The Bible, however, is confusing. Many fragments of manuscripts canonized by the Roman Catholic Church and many English translations as well as translations into other languages add to the confusion. There is no literal translation; only approximations to literal translations. The multitude of English translations renders claims of a single literal meaning of English-language Bibles impossible (Burr, 2009). Genesis 1–19 is an example. Traditional interpretations cite the creation story as evidence that God intended women and men to come together to propagate the Earth and say that this is the literal meaning of this story. Newer interpretations assert that the creation story is not meant to present a paradigm for all human relationships but to answer the question: Where do we come from? Also the creation story does not mention the varieties of human experience (Bennett, 1998).

Most Christians are not able to identify the particular verses of the Bible that are used to justify discrimination against lesbian and gay people. Nor do they know that Jesus said nothing on this topic. Nevertheless, they have the notion that same-sex relations are wrong (Walton, 2006). The Biblical references, whether one can identify them or not, suggest to those who hold the rejecting-punitive view that they are not only justified in hating and denigrating lesbian and gay people but are required to do so by their church. They are insulated from other views. They and their churches give no consideration to alternate views (Burr, 2009).

In addition to putting great emphasis on particular Bible passages, the rejecting-punitive view also fosters righteousness and morality by pointing to sin as a contrast. Morality stands in stark contrast to the depravity of immorality and sin. Lesbian and gay people are an acceptable target for vilification as they are viewed as depraved and immoral (Yakushko, 2005). Much of our society

overlooks social sins like poverty, crime, and exploitation of the earth. They are too overwhelming to handle, so people shift their attention to an enemy who seems easier to attack (Brown-Taylor, 2000).

Rejecting-punitive churches do not only rely on Bible verses or their notion of morality. Same-sex sexual behavior is also viewed as wrong because it is seen as annulling God's sexual design. Same-sex unions, they say, do not fulfill the procreative purpose of sexual intercourse and are an attack on families as the basic unit of society. This is the case even though many lesbian and gay people have children from earlier heterosexual marriages, insemination, or other means. In addition, sexuality is viewed as good only within marriage, so those representing the rejecting-punitive view require lesbian and gay people to be celibate (Hodge, 2005). To impose this on an entire group is unjust, as all humans have a right to sexuality (Nugent & Gramick, 1989).

If one grew up in a rejecting-punitive church, one no doubt received the negative messages about same-sex sexual identity cited above and many other messages of the same type. They came through religious teachings (for example, reading of the scriptures or other sacred texts, sermons, or discussions). They also observe prohibition of openly lesbian and gay clergy or religious leaders and isolation or avoidance of identified lesbian and gay people. Often sermons include admonitions against same-sex thoughts or deeds and say they are mortal sins. Church members internalize the prohibition "thou shall not be gay" (Lease et al., 2005).

Rejecting-punitive views are prevalent in many Christian churches, Jewish synagogues, and Islamic mosques and create conflict for lesbian and gay members (Yakushko, 2005). The most notable rejecting-punitive views in the United States, however, exist among the Christian churches. These are the churches we hear from the most in America in terms of their negative views of lesbian and gay people. In a study by Melton (1991) of Christian religious organizations, 72 percent were found to condemn lesbian and gay people and to call their same-sex attractions an abomination. The word "abomination," however, specifies a violation of ritual purity rather than referring to a moral or ethical violation (Schester, 1999).

Since the 1950s, scientists have learned a great deal about the wide variety of human sexual orientations and behaviors. Some religious denominations have been able to gain new understandings in response to these discoveries. But others have not been able to find a way to reconcile this information with their traditional belief systems. The congregations who allow the science of human sexuality to influence their understandings of scriptural principles often construct new theologies and do away with their institutions' oppression of sexual minorities. Their congregations vote to be inclusive. As noted earlier, religious groups that interpret scripture with a greater emphasis on historical context and allow for

greater variations in interpretation also report less prejudice and discrimination against lesbian and gay people (Nelson, 1982; Nungesser, 1983).

Conservative interpretations of the Bible passages cited above are also countered by liberal interpretations (Brammer, 2004). During the past 30 years, a growing number of biblical scholars, theologians, and clergy have commented on how difficult it is to draw conclusions about lesbian and gay issues from the Bible. At the time it was written, there were no words for “gay,” “lesbian,” or “homosexual.” These words did not exist in classic Greek or Hebrew. They did not appear in the Bible until 1946 (Mancini & Rzeznik, 1993). These words would not have had meaning before that time. In addition, the ancient world most likely did know of hostility to “homosexuality” (Burr, 2009). The fact that the word “homosexual” was not coined until the middle part of the 19th century presents challenges when attempting to discern what, if anything, the Bible says about it (Tolbert, 2002). Again, conservative Christians seem to pay no attention to these facts.

Churches with the rejecting-punitive view have the most organized political opposition against lesbian and gay people. Evangelical Protestants are the most organized in their opposition to lesbian and gay people, although Catholics and other Christian sects have also strongly opposed them (Miceli, 2005). This includes the Lubavitch sect of Judaism, which preaches abhorrence of same-sex sexual behaviors (Enron, 1993). Lesbian and gay people have no “religious citizenship” in most denominations (Yip, 2007).

Summary

Heterosexism is always in the background, if not the foreground, of the lives of lesbian and gay people. It also influences conservative religious views of them. Most religious denominations in the United States have highly negative views of lesbian and gay people. Many insist that to avoid burning in hell one must convert to heterosexuality. The rejection-punitive religious view is the most severe and troublesome to lesbian and gay people.