



Project Hearts & Minds, volume 4 Group discussion facilitator's guide

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Introduction

This facilitator's guide is designed to accompany the four 30-minute "Parents, Families, and Friends" TV shows on volume 4 of the Project Hearts & Minds VHS and DVD series, produced by the peninsula / San Jose chapter of PFLAG and distributed by More Light Presbyterians.

For each of the four shows, this facilitator's guide provides discussion questions that a facilitator / leader can use to promote discussion after a group of people has watched the show. You should of course feel free to come up with your own discussion questions, based on what you know about the group of people you've got watching the show. The questions below aren't meant to be used in any particular order, so feel free to skip around as desired.

Although the producers and editors of this TV series believe that all of the discussions in the shows are appropriate for youth audiences, we recommend that educators use the same approach with the Hearts & Minds series that you'd use with any video material. In most cases, educators will presumably want to watch the shows in advance of sharing them with youth audiences.

A note on language: today's gay rights movement commonly uses the 4-letter term "LGBT" as a shorthand for "lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender(ed)". Although this term is more inclusive than "gay" or "gay and lesbian", it's an unfamiliar jargon term to many audiences of the Hearts & Minds series. In this facilitator's guide we've intentionally erred on the side of simplicity, at the sacrifice of completeness, by using the words "gay and lesbian" in many of the questions rather than activist jargon terms such as "LGBT", "LGBTQQ", etc. This is a choice based on the types of audiences that we hope will be watching the Hearts & Minds series. Of course, for audiences more familiar with the terms in use within the LGBT equality movement, it's fine to substitute "LGBT" or similar expressions within these questions.

Heather Reichgott, San Francisco Theological Seminary graduate

Update on Heather's situation: (This information is more recent than the taping of the interview.) In April 2005, the Committee on Preparation for Ministry (CPM) of Redwoods Presbytery informed Heather that they had decided to refuse to certify her as "ready to seek a call" until the Presbyterian Book of Order changes. Unless and until the committee at some point changes its mind, this decision by the committee means that Heather can't submit her resume into the Presbyterian national job search database, nor can she serve in any pastoral or other called position within the Presbyterian Church U.S.A.

- Much of Heather's story is about self-discovery, coming to a realization of who she is and what God's call for her is. She comments that "the last place that I came out [as a lesbian] was church." Why do you think that church was the last place she came out?

- Heather notes that after she came out to herself, family and friends about being a lesbian, that it became easier for her to share her Christian faith with other people. Have you heard similar stories of other people who became better able to talk about their Christianity because they were honest about who they are?

- Heather describes her affection for Gillian, the "boxes and boxes" of letters that they wrote to each other while they were apart, how she hopes that some day they can get married, and so on. What other sorts of "here's what it's like to be in love" stories have you heard from people you know, and how do they compare to some of Heather's stories in the interview?

- Heather comments that at one church she heard a lot of sermons that compared homosexuality to alcoholism. How might you feel if you were told that your love for somebody else is like a destructive drug addiction?

- In describing the current relationship with her home church in Seattle, Heather mentions that there are church leaders who will refuse to read prayers for her during the "prayers of the people" time in Sunday worship. What are your thoughts about this practice of selectively dropping prayers for certain people, or what do you think you might say to the worship leader who does this?

- Heather describes current Presbyterian Church policy as one that encourages people not to tell the truth. What other examples have you heard of where an organization or business has policies in place that reward people for dishonesty and punish people for telling the truth?

- Heather mentions that she felt a calling to become a Christian minister in high school, and notes that she went straight from college to seminary. Did God make a mistake in calling Heather to the ministry? What thoughts come to your mind when she says, in the interview, that "God wants me to go and preach the good news of Jesus Christ to the world"?

Ken Kluczor, PFLAG dad

- Ken notes that his daughter Michelle's process of coming out to herself, of acknowledging that she's lesbian, was traumatic for her because of the negative feelings she had about lesbianism. In what ways can negative self-perceptions be harmful for children and youth, and how can parents and other adults help young people to feel positive about themselves?

- Ken comments about his daughter that "it never occurred to us that someone who was so naturally feminine could possibly be a lesbian." What fixed cultural images or presentations of lesbian women do you think Ken was overcoming as he acknowledged that his daughter is lesbian? Do TV, movies, and other media characterize lesbian women into a limited number of roles or types, and if so what are some of these types?

- Ken says that when he learned his daughter was lesbian, his first question to himself was "what did I do wrong?" However, parents don't typically ask themselves this question when they find out that their child is *heterosexual*. What negative conceptions of lesbian and gay people was Ken likely struggling with, that he was asking himself "what did I do wrong"?

- Ken notes that his earlier understanding of what "causes" homosexuality was that children become gay due to parents not acting according to specific gender roles -- the supposed "domineering mother" cause. This belief is based on long-discredited pseudo-scientific claims from the 1950's - false claims which are still repeated by many anti-gay religious groups today. What steps can people or society take to counter the use of pseudo-science when it's used to sustain and promote prejudice against a group of people?

- Ken comments that he was afraid to tell his friends that his daughter is lesbian, but it turned out that there was nothing to be afraid of -- he and his wife received only positive responses from their friends. What similar stories have you heard of, where somebody was afraid to talk about something that in retrospect turned out to not be a big deal?

- Ken notes from his PFLAG experiences that many parents of gay kids love their children very much, but still have a hard time talking about their child being lesbian or gay. What are some ways that people can make it easier for parents to be honest about who their children are?

John Ellefsen and Norma Ramos, Lavender Seniors

- John speaks of a female friend who half-joked that she'd "convert" him to a heterosexual orientation. How likely do you think it is that this could work in the other direction? Could your heterosexual friends be "converted" into becoming gay?

- John mentions how he was "unwilling to pay the social cost" of being openly gay. In what ways does our society offer support and acceptance to married heterosexual couples - support that we might not presently offer to gay or lesbian couples?

- Norma notes that very soon after she was hired for her present job, she mentioned to her employer that she "hoped this is a place that is very accepting of gay and lesbian people." If you were to say something similar in your workplace, or at your church, what do you think might be the response?

- Norma comments that many lesbian and gay seniors in particular can have a difficult time being open about their orientation, even with their doctors, due to a fear of prejudice. What are some ways that individuals and organizations can make it more safe for gay and lesbian people to be honest about who they are?

- People like John can sometimes experience discrimination of two forms: discrimination against gay people and discrimination based on age. What other groups or classes of people do you think experience discrimination today in our society, and what forms might this discrimination take?

Pam Walton, filmmaker

- The clips from Pam's 5th film, *Liberty*, show a community of women and the support they provide to each other in times of illness and death. What different types of communities do we have in our society that provide this type of social support and connection?

- Pam notes that she made the film *Out in Suburbia* partly in reaction to the stereotypical imagery of lesbian women that was often screened at gay/lesbian film festivals. What are some of the images or stereotypes that our society associates with gay people, and how do those stereotypes get in the way of us perceiving gay people as they truly are?

- Pam mentions the use of the term "family values" as a code phrase for "anti-gay". What images or ideas does the term "family values" bring to your mind? What might our society look like if we placed equal value on all types of families?

- Pam discusses how for her 3rd film she visited her father and they were able to say that they loved each other, while simultaneously not at all *liking* who the other person was or what he or she did. How does this work? What might it mean to simultaneously *love* somebody but not *like* them?

- Pam comments that it wasn't until she was in her 50's and making her 4th film, about the Lutheran Church, that she "for the first time in my life, met Christians whom I loved and respected." What does Pam's comment suggest about the experiences with Christianity that gay and lesbian people commonly have? What could churches do to increase the chances that people like Pam will meet Christians they feel they can respect, at some time before the age of 50?