

LGBT Panelists Training

UC Riverside

Speakers Bureau Overview
Sample Panel Questions
Common Arguments of the Radical Right
What Does the Christian Bible Say?

This manual was created by Nancy Jean Tubbs in 2000 for the University of California, Riverside's LGBT Resource Center. The Speaker's Bureau model is based on one created by Texas A&M University's GLBTA student organization in the 1990's. The manual was updated in 2007 by Jami Grosser (UC Riverside LGBTRC).

What is the Speakers Bureau?

- The Speakers Bureau is an effort to reduce homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia.
- The Speakers Bureau provides non-LGBT people with a positive, non-defensive interaction with LGBT individuals.
- The Speakers Bureau also reaches out to closeted or questioning audience members
- Speaking up and speaking out is what the Speakers Bureau is all about. We are reaching out to anyone who wants to know about what it is like to be LGBT in this day and age.
- Targeted audiences include undergraduate and graduate classes, campus organizations, RA training sessions, residence hall meetings, and community agencies.
- In general, Allies seminar panels are safe, supportive spaces for panelists. Large classroom or residence hall panels are more challenging. High school panels, especially for GSA's, might include straight panelists.

What is a panel like?

- Typically, panels are composed of four to six students. It is paramount that each panel has at least one male-bodied person and one female-bodied person. It is also critical that a racial/ethnic diversity be present. We can't have an all white panel!
- LGBTRC staff will act as facilitator/moderator to keep things running smoothly.
- Panels have three parts:
 1. Introduction by the facilitator
 2. Personal vignettes
 3. Question and answer period
- Each part has a purpose and is important, but the Q&A period covers most of the time.

Role of the Facilitator

- Greet professor or audience leader.
- Set up room if necessary and write panelists names on blackboard if possible.

- Give introductory speech to audience.
- Pick audience member to ask next question.
- Direct questions to panel members when necessary.
- Diffuse conflict.

What is the purpose of the introduction?

- Explains the panel format and ground rules.
- Sets appropriate audience expectations. Several key points are made:
 - Panelists are not trying to win a debate or deliver a lecture.
 - Audience members are encouraged to ask questions freely, without fear of being judged.
 - No topic is off-limits, although panelists may choose to pass on a question.
 - Panelists are speaking as individuals and do not speak for all LGBT people. Members of the panel may even disagree on certain subjects.
 - Explains that there is ethnic, racial, and religious diversity in the LGBT communities, and that the make-up of the panel is not necessarily a true cross-section.
 - Request confidentiality: It is okay to share what you learned from the panel, but please do not use people's names.

What is the purpose of the personal vignettes?

- Help establish commonalities with audience members, so that the panelists are seen as peers.
- Establish an atmosphere of personal sharing instead of social debate.
- Stimulate questions from the audience in the following Q&A segment.

Anatomy of a Personal Vignette

- Provide demographic information such as age, major/occupation, sexual orientation, relationship status, religion, hometown, ethnicity, other identities...
- Relevant and brief information about your LGBT experiences, perhaps including when you realized your sexual orientation or gender identity, coming out experiences, etc.

- Areas of commonality, including interests and hobbies, future plans, and family information.
- Vignettes should be at least 3-4 sentences in length after basic introduction (name, major, yr in school). Leave details for audience questions.

What is the purpose of the Q&A period?

- Establish a dialogue between the audience and panelists concerning specific questions and issues important to audience members.
- It is not a debate or a lecture.
- It is not necessary to convince audience members to agree with your views.

Role of the Panelists

The main role of the panelists is to provide a stimulating, non-defensive, caring presentation to the audience by being themselves and respecting both panel members and audience participants. The following is a list of considerations for panelists:

Dos

- Do be yourself and try to relax.
- Do repeat questions and get clarification if necessary before answering them.
- Do be honest and open, but know your limitations and boundaries.
- Do be succinct in your answers.
- Do use examples and experiences when answering questions.
- Do allow all the panelists to speak. Do be aware if you're always the first one to answer.
- Do use "I" statements.

Don'ts

- Don't be confrontational.
- Don't show hostility toward the audience. Be careful not to over personalize what is said.
- Don't cut off a person asking a question or another panelist speaking.
- Don't perpetuate stereotypes unnecessarily.
- Don't feel like you have to answer for the entire LGBT community.

- Don't feel you must answer every question.
- Don't encourage an us-them atmosphere. Try to relate to the audience in areas of commonality.
- Don't assume that everyone in the audience is straight. Do NOT "out" anyone.

Panelist Preparations and Skills

- Ask the coordinator who your audience will be and dress accordingly.
- Prepare an appropriate personal vignette.
- Observe at least one panel if you are inexperienced with speaking in a LGBT panel setting.
- Prepare for typical questions, including hostile ones. Review the sheet on Sample Questions.
- For the most part, panelists are just expected to be themselves, not trained experts. It is better to say you don't know something than to get it wrong.
 - Don't guess.
 - Clearly label personal opinions and speculation.
- Be prepared for a wide range of questions, but know your boundaries. Spend some time thinking about the kinds of questions that you would find too personal or otherwise prefer not to answer.
- You can usually count on the facilitator to handle any problems with the audience, but rehearsal of some general strategies is recommended.
 - Review the sheet on Handling Hostility.
 - Answer embarrassing questions with an educational purpose.
 - Know how to diffuse conflict, don't personalize hostility, and remain calm.
 - Acknowledge disagreement and move on before the exchange becomes a debate.

Panelist Responsibilities

- BE ON Time to a panel. It is best to arrive approximately ten minutes early so that the professor or audience leader knows you are all there. Panelists unfamiliar with each other can also meet briefly beforehand.
- Failure to be on time consistently may jeopardize future participation on panels.
- Call the LGBTRC staff coordinator as soon as possible if you cannot make a speaking engagement.

Coordinator Responsibilities

- Advertise the Speakers Bureau.
- Act as contact for people wishing to use the Speakers Bureau.
- Strive to provide diverse panels.
- Contact panelists in a timely manner with accurate time/place/purpose information.
- Address concerns of panelists and audiences after a panel.
- Train new panelists.

Speaking Effectively

- Make sure your audience can hear you.
- Speak slowly and clearly.
- Maintain eye-contact throughout the presentation, if you feel comfortable doing so.
- Maintain good posture.
- Use variety in the tone, speed, and volume of your voice.
- Say something worth listening to.
- Use humor if you feel comfortable with it.
- Forge bonds with members of your audience.
- Expect a wide range of familiarity with LGBT issues.
- Define any words, phrases, abbreviations, or acronyms that are not universally understood (e.g. Coming Out, LGBTRC, heterosexism).
- Listen carefully to the questions that are posed.
- Acknowledge and appreciate audience members.
- Try not to take hostile remarks or verbal attacks personally.
- Do not spend all of your time on one question or one discussion.
- Be sensitive to other panelists.
- Most of all, be yourself. Some questions might be too personal; others you may not feel qualified to answer.

Sample Panel Questions

Below are just a few questions asked of Speakers Bureau panelists in the past. Think about which ones you would feel comfortable answering, and whether you have expert knowledge (e.g. psychological studies) or personal anecdotes to share. Are you knowledgeable about terminology (e.g. heterosexism), LGBT history (e.g. Stonewall), or current controversies (e.g. Same sex marriage debate)? The primary purpose of a panel is to share your life experiences with an audience. However, consider actively educating yourself on LGBT issues to make the panel even more educational.

Coming Out

1. Are you out to your family? What was their response? How old were you?
2. When did you come out to yourself? When did you know you were LGBT?
3. Do all your friends know?
4. Are there any people that you're not out to?
5. Did you ever try to deny your feelings for the same sex in order to fit in?
6. Does being gay affect your self-esteem?
7. Did your entire group of friends change when you openly came out about your sexuality?

Nature vs. Nurture

1. Do you feel you were born LGBT or did you choose it?
2. Do you think there is a "gay gene?"
3. Does homosexuality occur in nature?
4. Was there anything traumatic that influenced your sexuality?

Religion

1. Are you religious? How does that affect your sexuality? And vice versa?
2. Are you Christian?
3. Do feel like being LGBT is a sin?

Intersections of Identities

1. How did your culture/ethnicity influence/affect your sexuality and coming out?
2. Was it harder coming out in an Asian/Mexican/Middle Eastern/Black/etc. family?
3. Do you feel like you have to choose between your sexuality and your culture/religion/community?

Dating/Relationships

1. Where do you meet people?
2. Do you have gaydar? What is gaydar? How do you know who is also LGBT?
3. Are you in a relationship? Does your family know?
4. Do you ever have crushes on straight people?
5. Have you ever had a crush on a non-LGBT friend?
6. Do you want to have children some day? How?
7. Do homosexual people feel that the dynamics of their relationships are different those of heterosexual couples?

Sex

1. What kind of sex do two women have?
2. Do all gay men like anal sex?
3. What's your favorite kind of sex?
4. Do two women need to practice safer sex?

Media

1. What do you think of TV shows like *Will & Grace*, *L Word*, and *Queer as Folk*? Do you think it's a real depiction of LGBT people?
2. What do you think of movies like *Brokeback Mountain*, or *I Now Pronounce You Chuck and Larry*?

Identity

1. What does queer mean?
2. What does pansexual mean?

UCR Experience

1. Are you out on campus?
2. Have you experienced harassment or discrimination on campus?
3. Do you feel safe at UCR?
4. How does it feel to be constantly fighting for equality? Do you ever get tired and feel like giving up?
5. How do LGBTs deal with a society, which sees them as not normal?
6. Is gay bashing as bad as it used to be?
7. Is it more accepted to be lesbian than gay in our society?
8. What could heterosexuals do to make bisexuals and homosexuals feel more accepted in society?

Bisexuality/Pansexuality

1. How often do you date women/men?
2. When you date someone, are they worried that you'll leave them for the other sex?
3. Which sex do you prefer?
4. I have heard from many people (straight and gay) that nobody is bisexual. Is this true?
5. How are bisexual experiences different than or similar to straight/heterosexual experiences?
6. Bisexual people sometimes get labeled as "greedy" and sometimes bisexuality is not through nature but nurture - why does this happen? How is it different from homosexuality?

Stereotypes/Expectations

1. Do you think that just because you are gay/lesbian that you are forced to act "feminine" as a gay male or "manly" as a lesbian? Is it a natural thing?
2. Can you still be masculine and gay?
3. Are most tomboys gay?

4. Being gay doesn't mean to be feminine, so why do some gay men act very womanly? If lesbians are considered man-haters, why do some act/dress manly?

Transgender Identities

1. What is the difference between a hermaphrodite and a transsexual?
2. Do transsexuals see themselves as normal?
3. What does intersex mean?
4. Are transgender people gay?

Common Arguments of the Radical Right

The Radical Right have come up with an entire series of arguments they use to attack gays and lesbians. Some of these arguments are focus-tested works of propaganda that would make Goebbels blush, others are as crude as the taunts of a schoolyard bully. They are all used in an effort to confuse and mislead the American public. This page lists over 50 common right-wing arguments as well as brief responses.

Overview

Right-wing arguments against homosexuality fall into four rough categories. An specific right wing argument will usually contain elements from several of these broad categories mixed together.

"Ew Ick!"

This category just focuses on how gross those homos are...watch for key words like "abomination", "unnatural", "perverted", "gross", "sick", "diseased" as well as references to specific sexual acts or practices. Most of the anti-AIDS stuff falls here as well.

"It is immoral"

The Bible-thumper category. These argument are focused on what they Bible says (or doesn't say) about homosexuality. If you see references to Leviticus, Romans, or Sodom and Gomorrah, you are here.

"behavior/choice"

This category includes arguments that being gay is a choice (and thus worth of being condemned) or it tries to reduce all aspects of homosexuality down to a matter of specific acts or behaviors. This "behavioral determinism" essentially denies that gays are capable of feelings such as love and reduces everything to lustful actions.

"weird science"

These argument usually try to use scientific (il)logic to back their cause. Common variants include people who argue that homosexuality cannot be genetic for various reasons, as well as passing along ancient psychiatric opinions and flawed demographic studies, such Paul Cameron's obituary "study."

The arguments

Generic Arguments

1. It is unnatural/an "abomination"
2. It is a choice
3. It is anti-family
4. It is a sin/against the Bible
5. It is an illness
6. The only reason homosexuality was declassified as an illness was because of political pressure
7. Gays spread AIDS
8. What about Sodom and Gommorrah?
9. Gays are only 1% of the population
10. Gays are pedophiles
11. What about NAMBLA?
12. Gays recruit.
13. Gay people can be made straight...I've seen proof

14. All gays think about is sex; they can't control themselves
15. Gays flaunt themselves
16. Gays don't live long
17. God made Adam and Even not Adam and Steve
18. Homosexuality is a behavior
19. Gays can't reproduce.
20. Legitimation of homosexuality will lead to legitimization of pedophilia, rape, bestiality, etc.
21. Ordinary Americans are opposed to homosexuals
22. Gays would be OK if they kept it to themselves
23. Homosexuality is contrary to traditional values.

Arguments against same-sex marriage

24. It will weaken the institution of marriage
25. Marriage is defined as a man and a woman
26. Gay marriage will violate my religious freedom
27. Some court shouldn't be able to legalize gay marriage when most people are against it
28. Marriage benefits are so people can raise families
29. Gays are not denied the right to marry, they just have to marry someone of the opposite sex.
30. If we open up marriage to same sex couples, why not marry your (dog/sister/car)
31. Marriage is a privilege, not a right.
32. Society has always operated based on male-female coupling and the nuclear family.
33. Gay marriage may lead to gay adoption.

Arguments against civil rights laws

34. Homosexuality is a behavior not a characteristic, therefore it doesn't deserve protection.
35. Gay civil rights will trivialize "real" minorities' rights.
36. Gays have not suffered like blacks/other minorities.
37. There isn't any real discrimination against gays
38. Gay civil rights violate my religious freedom.
39. Gay civil rights will lead to lots of expensive lawsuits.
40. Gays do not meet the qualifications of a suspect class.
41. Gay civil rights are a social stamp of approval on homosexuality.
42. Gay civil rights will lead to quotas and affirmative action ("I'll be forced to hire gays")
43. Gay civil rights reward criminal behavior (in states with sodomy laws)
44. Gays are asking for "special rights"
45. Gays are wealthy and don't need these protections
46. What about gay teachers then?
47. Employment rights laws would lead to gays behaving inappropriately in the workplace
48. What about freedom of speech?

Arguments against hate crimes legislation

49. All crimes are "hate crimes," why single any crimes out?
50. Hate crimes laws punish the thoughts of the criminal
51. Hate crimes laws will end up criminalizing speech

Arguments against Domestic Partnership Benefits

- 52. DP benefits undermine the family
- 53. DP benefits draw an unwarranted comparison between DPs and married couples
- 54. DP benefits are too expensive

Miscellaneous Arguments

- 55. Famous Person X is against gay rights

1. It is unnatural/an "abomination"

So if flying, but you don't see people trying to ban airplanes. Seriously, by definition there is nothing "unnatural" about being gay. Being gay is not "against nature" because gay people are created that way. Homosexuality is seen in all mammalian species as well. Finally, if by "unnatural" you mean "in the minority" then you'd have to say that people with green eyes or red hair are unnatural as well.

2. It is a choice

Yes, I made the choice to become a member of the world's most unpopular minority...I LOVE having my rights denied and getting yelled and threatened with bodily harm at strangers! A person no more "chooses" to be gay than they choose whether to be right or left handed. The only choice is between a closeted life of denial and fear or the strength that comes from telling the truth.

3. It is anti-family

Tell that to my parents, my siblings and my partner. Every gay person is a part of a family. Indeed, the most admirable "family values" are exhibited by groups like PFLAG. The only requirement for a family is love. Gay people who form families by committing their relationships and by adopting children should they choose deserve the same level of social support and recognition as any family.

4. It is a sin/against the Bible

Depending on how you read the Bible, it is also a sin to eat shellfish or wear two different kinds of cloth at once. Anyway, if a person chooses to believe being gay is a sin, there is nothing we can do to stop them...freedom of religion applies to all. However, people may not impose their religious beliefs on others, because along with freedom of belief is separation of church and state.

5. It is an illness

The American Psychological Association, the American Psychiatric Association, and the American Medical Association have all weighed in on the issue and come to the same conclusion: homosexuality is a neutral human characteristic. To characterize it as an illness is just incorrect.

6. The only reason homosexuality was declassified as an illness was because of political pressure

Do you claim that "homosexual lobbyists" "infiltrated" not only the ranks of the American Psychiatric Assn, but also those of the American Medical Assn, the National Assn of Social Workers, and the American Psychological Assn, as well as the comparable professional organizations in other countries all of which adopted and continue to maintain similar positions? That they have been controlling all these organizations worldwide for the past 24 years? That they have forced all these organizations to publicly maintain and reaffirm their positions on the issue over the last 24 years? And that they are controlling all

the individual health practitioners (doctors, psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, etc.) who belong to these organizations; and that these people personally disagree with the stated positions of their respective organizations?

7. Gays spread AIDS

Straights spread syphilis. Heterosexuals also spread AIDS. AIDS is caused by a virus, and the virus does not discriminate. Unsafe sex by anyone will spread the disease.

8. What about Sodom and Gomorrhah?

What about them? These are Biblical stories which can be interpreted in many ways. Most scholars agree that the sin of Sodom was inhospitality, not same-sex affection. Besides, America becomes a religious theocracy and your church is Official State Church, your opinion on "Sodom and Gomorrhah" is not relevant.

9. Gays are only 1% of the population

So what if they are? Playing "number games" only clouds the issue. Whether gays are 10% or 1% of the population is irrelevant to the issues at hand. Do you suggest that there is some numeric threshold under which a minority is no longer worth of civil rights?

10. Gays are pedophiles

Nope. According the FBI Uniform Crime Report, over 99% of all pedophilia cases are molestations of little girls by older men...heterosexual older men.

11. What about NAMBLA?

What about the KKK? Or Operation Rescue? There are fringe groups all over the American political spectrum, and it is wrong to try to smear a huge group of people based on what a tiny fringe might be talking about.

12. Gays recruit.

"Come...join an unpopular minority today!" Seriously, this argument didn't work 20 years ago and still doesn't work today. The entire theory of recruiting is dependent upon the idea that peoples' sexual orientation can be changed, which it cannot.

13. Gay people can be made straight...I've seen proof

On the 700 Club no doubt. A lucrative cottage industry of brainwashing camps exist to take advantage of self-hating gay people to try to "turn" them straight. The kind of high-intensity psychological torture employed by these facilities makes it not surprising that they have a few "successful" graduates of bisexual men who have been "turned" straight. However, the number of dropouts of these programs is extraordinarily high, and even the original founders of the Exodus Ministry (the biggest name in this kind of thing) have since admitted they were wrong and are both happily living as God intended them, gay.

14. All gays think about is sex; they can't control themselves

Apparently you have never been to a college frat house or the Mardi Gras...it seems like heterosexuals have the same "problem." Seriously, gays think about sex as much as straight people, no more, no less.

15. Gays flaunt themselves

Heterosexuals flaunt themselves. They kiss and hold hands in public. They talk about their wives or girlfriends. They watch TV shows and movies full of heterosexuality. Magazines and book...constant heterosexuality. Ever seen wedding announcements -- constant flaunting...not to mention advertisements, even musical lyrics...just a constant barrage of flaunting "breeders." Now...you were saying?

16. Gays don't live long

And you have a study to prove it. This study was conducted by Paul Cameron, who has since been disbarred from his professional organization for fraudulent and unethical research practices. The study in question was based on the sampling of ages in obituaries in gay newspapers, which was completely non-random sample and an unrepresentative sample size among other things. It was a fraud.

17. God made Adam and Even not Adam and Steve

God made Adam and Eve and Steve. To say otherwise is rank arrogance.

18. Homosexuality is a behavior

This line of argument assumes that somehow people only have their sexuality when they are actively having sex, which is nonsense. A person is homosexual or heterosexual all the time. It is a part of who they are. A celibate person still has a sexuality, as does a virgin.

19. Gays can't reproduce.

First of all, they can, and do. Second of all, it is quite possible for a genetic trait to be passed on even if individuals showing the trait never reproduce. Genes can be recessive, and there is also a genetic characteristic called "penetrance" which works in a similar way to pass on genetic traits without direct descendancy.

20. Legitimization of homosexuality will lead to legitimization of pedophilia, rape, bestiality, etc.

This is a common variation of the "slippery slope argument" and is a logical fallacy. Legitimization of homosexuality has nothing to do with anything else; it is an issue in and of itself. Rape, pedophilia, etc are all violent acts committed without consent upon another being.

21. Ordinary Americans are opposed to homosexuals

Gays ARE ordinary Americans. Constant attempts to paint gays as being some alien presence in America are plain wrong, gay people are as much a part of America as any other group. Survey after survey proves that people who personally know a gay person are much more tolerant individuals, which is why as more and more gay people come out, the overall level of support for gays in America continues to rise.

22. Gays would be OK if they kept it to themselves

Nope, been there, done that. Being forced to be closeted; to deny an essential part of one's self is a recipe for self-hatred, despair, and suicide. Indeed, people who say "stay in the closet" are asking gays to do to themselves what the asking party would never dream of allowing themselves to be subjected to. Such a request is hypocritical and wrong.

23. Homosexuality is contrary to traditional values.

What values were you referring to? The values of respect for others, tolerance of differences, constitutional liberties, individual rights, love, and religious freedom? ...or something else?

24. It will weaken the institution of marriage

Marriage is pretty weak right now. 50% of marriage end in divorce. Allowing gay couples to marry will not weaken the institution, but rather give it new strength. For one, most gay couples will marry out of love, not for the wide variety of bad reasons heterosexuals often get married (unplanned pregnancies, family pressure, etc).

25. Marriage is defined as a man and a woman

Marriage can be "Defined" however one wants. It is all words. 30 years ago, marriage was defined as "one man and one woman of one race." Times change.

26. Gay marriage will violate my religious freedom

No, it will not. This debate is over the civil marriage rights. Your church will not be required to perform any marriage that it doesn't want to. Currently, many religions will not perform mixed-faith weddings, but they are still recognized by the state. Same thing will hold true for same-sex marriages.

27. Some court shouldn't be able to legalize gay marriage when most people are against it

This is a very bad argument. First of all, once the day comes that 51% of people are in favor of same-sex marriage, your argument is moot. Secondly, if civil rights are being violated, a court has to stand up. That is the function of the courts. Majority rule does not allow majorities to trample on the rights of minorities; this is a fundamental American value.

28. Marriage benefits are so people can raise families

Then you support denying infertile heterosexual couples the right to marry? That's what I thought. The purpose of marriage benefits are that there is a social interest in stable relationships between people...this is the "glue" which holds a lot of society together...committed gay couples have every right to the benefits and responsibilities of marriage. Having a child has never been a qualification for marriage.

29. Gays are not denied the right to marry, they just have to marry someone of the opposite sex.

This is a very bad argument. It is similar to saying that elections in Communist China are free because every citizens can vote for whoever they want as long as that person is a Communist. A choice with no real freedom attached is not a free choice.

30. If we open up marriage to same sex couples, why not marry your (dog/sister/car)

Another slippery slope argument, and just as false as all others based on this premise. Marriage is a legal contract. To have a contract, you must have two parties who are capable of consenting to such a contract. Fido cannot consent. Neither can your Buick.

On a deeper level, the slippery slope argument also shows how low right-wingers think of gays. To compare the willingness of two people to enter into a lifelong commitment of love and caring to pets or automobiles is denying the very capability of gay people to express human emotions such as love. In essence, it is an argument which claims gays are sub-human.

31. Marriage is a privilege, not a right.

In *Loving v Virginia* (1967) the US Supreme Court defined marriage as a fundamental human right. End of story.

32. Society has always operated based on male-female coupling and the nuclear family.

Besides being untrue, this argument also seems to assume that the traditional male-female coupling (and the nuclear family) are the only legitimate ways of living life. Not only does this leave gay couples in the cold, but it also leaves singles, single parents, childless couples, and many other Americans as simply not being a "legitimate" part of America. Period. This is wrong.

33. Gay marriage may lead to gay adoption.

So what? Right now thousands of unwanted kids languish in state homes. Having more stable two-parent households is a very good thing for these children; perhaps they will get the love and parental caring they deserve.

34. Homosexuality is a behavior not a characteristic, therefore it doesn't deserve protection

Even if homosexuality were a behavior, this would not make a difference; religion is a behavior and it is protected under civil rights law. Anyway, homosexuality is not based on any kind of behavior, rather it is a state of being...it is a characteristic which makes up part of the identity of the gay person. To call such an intrinsic trait a "behavior" dehumanizes and in effect says that gay people are not fully human.

35. Gay civil rights will trivialize "real" minorities' rights

This premise is based on the false assumption that there are only a limited amount of rights to go around, and that by extending rights to a new group, we must remove someone else's rights. fundamentally, this is a ridiculous concept. Civil rights are for everybody, and granting them to a group which has none does nothing to "take away" these rights from anyone else.

36. Gays have not suffered like blacks/other minorities

Face it: all minorities have suffered in some way. While the actual suffering might be different for everyone, the fact is that bigotry and hate are bigotry and hate, no matter who they are aimed at. There is no "suffer-o-meter" that determines who gets civil rights, and setting one minority against another in such fruitless arguments only serves those who want to divide us all.

37. *There isn't any real discrimination against gays*

This is demonstrably false. Reams of testimony exist and have been presented to Congress and other bodies documenting the extent of prejudice against gays. Real people are fired from their jobs, denied housing, and refused service because of their sexual orientation. It happens every day.

38. *Gay civil rights violate my religious freedom*

This argument is usually based on the idea that if someone religion forbids homosexuality, then the state granting civil rights to gays somehow threatens their religion. This is untrue; your church may continue preaching and acting however it wishes. What civil rights cover are the PUBLIC and SECULAR arena; they are not intended to cover spiritual affairs. It is ironic that this same argument was used by racist churches in the South when they fought against black civil rights in the 1960s. Their argument was false then, and it is still false today.

39. *Gay civil rights will lead to lots of expensive lawsuits*

Once again, untrue. There are over 200 gay civil rights laws on the books throughout the United States. If such laws led to expensive suits, you would think this would be apparent by now. However, nothing like this has ever occurred. Even in a liberal, lawsuit-happy place like San Francisco, they have never had a problem with lawsuits in the 25 years they have had a gay rights law. The same is true everywhere else such laws have been passed.

40. *Gays do not meet the qualifications of a suspect class*

This is incorrect. Gays meet the three requirements of a suspect class:

- a. Homosexuality is an immutable characteristic: whether set by the genes or very early in life, no one seriously argues that gays choose their orientation. Indeed, all the scientific evidence, as well as all of the real-world experiences of gay people point to the inescapable conclusion that being gay is a fundamental and unchangeable part of who someone is.
- b. Gays have traditionally been discriminated against: Persistent and long-standing prejudice and animus towards gays is a common and unremarkable part of American life. Real-world examples of discrimination are common and easily documented.
- c. Gays are politically powerless: This can be easily proven as well. Gay officeholders account for less than one tenth of one percent of America's elected officials. There are no gay senators, and only 2 gay congressional members. Gays have only been able to secure their rights in a handful (about 200) political entities.

41. *Gay civil rights are a social stamp of approval on homosexuality*

Untrue. A civil rights law exists to protect civil liberties. They do not put a stamp of approval on any individual or class, they merely state that it is wrong to harm such people. However, on a broader level, civil rights laws do make the statement that politically, gays are equal citizens of this nation, that they deserve the same God-given rights all Americans do. Period.

42. *Gay civil rights will lead to quotas and affirmative action ("I'll be forced to hire gays")*

Untrue. Just about every law passed these days has a clause stating that the law cannot be used to require any kind of affirmative action or quota system. It's right there in the text of these laws. Affirmative action is a separate issue from civil rights.

43. Gay civil rights reward criminal behavior (in states with sodomy laws)

Sodomy laws (where they are on the books) prohibit specific sex acts. They say nothing about sexual orientation, which is an entirely separate issue.

44. Gays are asking for "special rights"

No, gays are asking for equal rights. Noticeable in all these laws is that they protect "sexual orientation" -- both gay and straight. No one is getting "special rights" merely the same equal rights that others already enjoy.

45. Gays are wealthy and don't need these protections

According to whom? There have never been any authoritative surveys on the overall wealth of gays and probably never will be (not when so many are closeted). And even if this accusation were true...so what? Is there a wealth thresh-hold where we take away peoples' civil rights if they make too much money?

46. What about gay teachers then?

What about gay garbage collectors and gay accountants? Fact is there are and will always be gay teachers. Open ones too. This objection comes from the old theory that a gay teacher might try to "Recruit" children in a classroom, which is crazy. About the only affect of gay teachers on children is that the kids might learn that gays are ordinary people...I suppose for some radical right wingers, this is something to be concerned about!

47. Employment rights laws would lead to gays behaving inappropriately in the workplace

Ah, the old "sex by the water cooler" fear. Once again, unadulterated BS. Anyone of any sexual orientation who brings sex into the workplace should be shown the door. Civil rights laws do not protect behavior, they protect people from being fired because of who they are as people.

48. What about freedom of speech?

What about it? Civil rights laws do not cover speech, they cover behavior. A bigot will still be free to speak out against homosexuals even with civil rights legislation; there is no threat to free speech. What a person cannot do is take the physical action of discriminating against a person because of their sexual orientation.

49. All crimes are "hate crimes," why single any crimes out?

Hate crimes go beyond ordinary crimes by collectively victimizing an entire class of people. If a person is beaten up for their money, they are the victim of a simple assault. Someone who is beaten up because they are gay has had an essential part of their humanity attacked, and as such the emotional trauma is much deeper. The criminal has targeted not only the individual, but all of society as well, and this should be punished severely.

50. Hate crimes laws punish the thoughts of the criminal

No, they punish the actions of the criminal. Thinking about beating someone up because they are gay is not a crime. Beating someone up because they are gay is.

51. Hate crimes laws will end up criminalizing speech

Gain, untrue. Speech is well-protected. You can verbally bash and attack gays all you want...it is when you step over the line into taking direct action that you become a criminal.

52. DP benefits undermine the family

The question needs to be reversed and asked back: "how does a piece of paper or a benefit recognizing two peoples' commitment to each other undermine YOUR family?" Of course, it does not. Your family (or marriage) is still as strong (or weak) as it was before DP benefits.

53. DP benefits draw an unwarranted comparison between DPs and married couples

No, they recognize that two people who share the same life commitment as a married couple deserve the same benefits. Right now, same-sex couples do not have the option of marrying. If benefits for unmarried couples still bother you so much, fight for the legalization of gay marriage and there will be no need for DP benefits any more.

54. DP benefits are too expensive

Hundreds of America's biggest corporations have decided to offer DP benefits. These are businesses who do not do anything unless the bottom line works out for them. If they think DP benefits make good economic sense and are not too expensive, then they are right. Who are you to question the business sense of Microsoft.

55. Famous Person X is against Gay Rights

For every "famous person" that you can name as being opposed to gay rights, one can name a dozen who feel the other way. Face it, it is always going to be possible to find one "authority" to back up just about any point a person wants to make. Selective quoting of celebrities, and misguided appeals to authority have no bearing on a debate.

Source

URL http://www.turnleft.com/out/knowthy_arguments.html

What Does the Christian Bible Say?

Taken from "What Does the Christian Bible Say?" (1992) by Frank Jernigan, GLBSB Newsletter, 3-4).

On the Defense

Here is a brief description of key verses used to condemn [LGB people], and what they really mean:

Leviticus 18:22 - "Thou shall not lie with mankind as with womankind: it is an abomination." There is a similar reference repeated in Lev. 20:13.) Both references probably pertain to temple prostitution and idolatry. They are no longer under the law. If this law is still in effect, all the other laws described in Leviticus would also be in effect (the requirement for circumcision, prohibitions against eating pork and shellfish, etc.). Ask [yourself] how many people follow those rules. Leviticus is the only apparently explicit reference to homosexuality in the old testament.

Genesis 19:4-9 - The story of Sodom leading up to the city's destruction became the basis of the belief that the sin of Sodom was homosexuality (hence the term "sodomite").

The offense described in this passage is not homosexual behavior, but rather the mistreatment of strangers and rape. Ezekial 16:49-50 (NIV) says "Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed, and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and the needy. They were haughty and did detestable things before me."

What Jesus had to say about homosexuality - Nothing!

What Paul had to say about homosexuals - The word translated as "homosexual" in modern verses of the Bible ("effeminate" in the King James version) is much disputed and probably means male temple prostitute. It would be difficult to deny that Paul was your basic homophobe, as most explicitly revealed in Romans 1:26-27 ("Because of this [practice of idolatry], 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.")

He goes on to describe these same people as being "filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed, and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant, and boastful..." In fact, every person is included here in one category or another, including all born-again Christians. This is merely the beginning of Paul's premise that "There is no one righteous, not even one" that he follows with the explanation that salvation cannot come by our own efforts, but only through the grace of God.

On the Offense

There are many biblical passages that suggest God loves lesbians as much as he loves any human being, including our behavior:

Old Testament - A prominently recurring theme is that God is on the side of the oppressed (Psalm 103:6 - "The Lord works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed." Psalm 82:3 - "Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless; maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed.") There are many others.

"Do not mistreat an alien [stranger, misfit, or queer] or oppress him, for you were aliens in Egypt." This is one of the most repeated commandments in the Old Testament. Exodus 22:21,23:9, Leviticus 19:34, Deuteronomy 24:17, and over thirty similar verses in the rest of the Old Testament. Compare the number of verses proscribing homosexual acts (two, if any) and the number of verses proscribing mistreatment of queers (over thirty). Which do you think God is more concerned about?

New Testament - Which of the following is closer to a statement of the "gospel," the "good news" that Christ commissioned his followers to tell the world:

A. God, the unrelenting avenger of sin, is coming to seek out all people unworthy of eternal life to throw them in the fires of Hell for eternal torment. Therefore, you better try to understand every requirement of God (both do's and don'ts) and try as hard as you can to live according to them, in the almost impossible hope that you won't be among the condemned.

B. God, who is love, unbounded and unconditional, has completed in Christ whatever was necessary (for whatever reason it was necessary) to reunite all people with God. By experiencing, i.e., receiving, trusting in, contemplating the reality of this divine acceptance, we can grow in our ability to feel and express this kind of love for other people.

A prominently recurring theme, God's unconditional love, is found in the following passages:

Romans 8:38 - "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

I John 3:1 - "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!"

I John 4:7-12 - "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. [My, how inclusive!] Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love each other, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us." [Is it even remotely conceivable that such love would exclude people on the basis of their sexual orientation???].

And finally,

Romans 8:31 - "If God is for us, who can be against us?"

Dealing with Dogmatists

Who are religious dogmatists?

- Probably all religions have them.
- They rely on externalized expressions of "truth."
- Self-worth is measured in degree of conformity to this "truth," whether conformity through the intellectual knowledge of it, adherence to its practices, or parroting its sanctioned phrases.

Keep in mind:

- You will not be able to change the mind of a hard-core religious dogmatist.
- By presenting yourself as proud to be who you are, self-confident in the face of a "moral attack," you will say more to the others in the room than any amount of arguing can.

Preparations for fielding religious questions:

- Examine your own beliefs and learn to articulate them.
- Rely on what you believe to be true within yourself.
- Uncover the basis you have for believing you are OK.