

The Lesbian Community



Researched by

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I. Demographics

- Lesbians are women who are sexually attracted to and have romantic relationships with other women. Sexual feelings toward other women are normal to them.
- Realistic and accurate statistics about lesbians are hard to find. This is because many lesbians are not comfortable being open about their sexuality.
- Portland, Maine has the third-largest concentration of lesbian couples in the United States.

II. Living Arrangements

- The U.S. Census 2000 has estimated that gay and lesbian couples cohabitate in 99.3% of all counties across the U.S. However, the Human Rights Commission estimates that the U.S. Census could undercount gay and lesbian couples by as much as 62%.
- Maine has eleven towns that have laws to prevent housing discrimination for gay couples, but there is not a state law to prevent housing discrimination.

III. Family, Relationships, & Roles

- There is no consistent sense in the lesbian community of how relationships as parents/guardians should play out.
- Lesbians often feel stress about telling their families they are gay. Even those who have open supportive families can never be sure how their family will react. Some families embrace partners while other women are ostracized from the family because they are lesbian.
- Current research shows that having gay or lesbian parents does not affect the quality of parenting.
- Lesbians who have children often fear how their children will react when they find out their mother is a lesbian.
- Having a lesbian partner provides a sense of love and commitment. However because gay marriage is not legal, lesbian couples are not afforded the 1500 laws that support married couples.

IV. Leisure/Play

Clubs/bars

- **Lewiston:**

The Sportsman's Club – 2 Bates Street, Lewiston, ME (207) 784-2251

- **Augusta:**

P.J's – 80 Water Street, Augusta, ME 04330 (207) 623-4041

- **Ogunquit:**

The Club – 13 Main Street, Ogunquit, ME (207) 646-6655

Front Porch Lounge & Piano Bar – Ogunquit Square Ogunquit, ME
(207) 646-4005

Leisure Inn of Ogunquit – 6 School Street, Ogunquit, ME (207) 646-2737

Maine Street – Maine Street Rt. 1 Ogunquit, ME (207) 646-5101

Maxwell's Pub- 27 Main Street, Ogunquit, ME (207) 646-2345

Ogunquit Beach Inn- 8 School Street, Ogunquit, ME (207) 646-1112

- **Bangor:**
The Spectrum – 190 Harlow Street, Bangor, ME (207) 942-3000
- **Portland:**
Sisters- 45 Danforth Street, Portland, ME (207) 774-1505
Somewhere else – 117 Spring Street, Portland, ME
- **Entertainment**
Karaoke - Somewhere else
Sister Space – www.sisterspace@yahoo.com, (207) 878-2152
Dyke Dates – Calendar of activities for Lesbians in Southern Maine
www.alyse@psouth.net

V. Support groups

- Solo – Single Older Lesbians Organization- Durham, ME (207) 752-7686
- Dignity Maine – Supportive masses for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered Catholics. www.dignityusa.org
- Gay In Maine – Maine Gay & Lesbian Website, www.gayinmaine.com
- Southern Maine Pride – Volunteer based organization, www.southernmainepride.org, (207) 773-4188
- Family Pride Coalition, www.familypride.org
- Sappho's Sisters- Saco, ME, www.ksgillis@netzero.net, or www.alenes18@yahoo.com

VI. Legal Concerns

- **Maine's Domestic Partner Law**
This bill went in effect in July 30, 2004 to support rights of domestic partners of the same sex. It allows same-sex partner's access to legal protection in the event the partner dies. Provides inheritance rights, kin status, victim's compensation, and guardian and conservator rights to domestic partners.
- **Maine Marriage/Relationship Recognition Law**
Maine bans recognition of same-sex marriage.
- **Parenting Laws**
Facto parental rights – In a case tried in Maine a lesbian was given parental rights to her child even though she was not legally married.
Maine law is not clear on the issue of lesbians adopting children.
Lesbian women cannot adopt the biological child of their partner.
It is common for lesbian woman to undergo artificial insemination.
- **Non-Discrimination Laws**
The Maine Human Rights law extends only to discrimination based on “race, color, religious affiliation, sex, national origin, age, physical handicap or mental handicap.”

VII. Health & Wellness Issues

Although all women are susceptible to the health concerns listed below, research shows the following to be more prevalent in the lesbian population:

- *Cancer*
Pregnancy before the age of thirty gives off a surge of estrogen that helps reduce the risk of breast, ovarian, and endometrial cancer in women. Lesbians are less likely to become pregnant or breastfeed, so they don't experience the surge of estrogen that comes along with pregnancy, which increases their risk to such cancers. Routine screenings for such cancers can assist in early diagnosis, which significantly increases the rate of survival. Research shows lesbians are less likely to have routine screenings for such cancers. Certain cancers occur at higher rates in smokers. Research shows that lesbian women are more likely to smoke than heterosexual women.
- *Mental Health*
Some lesbians suffer from anxiety, lack of self-esteem and depression. Lesbians often have lost emotional support from their families. Many lesbians feel the need to hide their sexual orientation due to discrimination, which causes anxiety.
- *Fitness*
Research confirms that lesbians are more likely to be overweight due to life stressors. This can lead to other significant health concerns, such as heart disease, cancers, or premature death.
- *Osteoporosis*
There is evidence that suggests that lesbians have a higher rate of bone loss making them more susceptible to osteoporosis. This is likely due to having a higher tendency to smoke or because of physical inactivity.
- *Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD'S)*
Women can contract STD's from having sex with other women. A recent study indicated that women who have sex with women are at the same risk for STD's as heterosexual women.
One of the most frequently identified vaginal infections in lesbians is Bacterial Vaginosis (BV). Research suggests that this infection is transmitted primarily through lesbian women because no male counterpart has been found.
- *Substance Use*
Discrimination can cause low self-esteem, anxiety and/or depression leading lesbians to be more likely to have substance abuse problems than heterosexual women.

VIII. Barriers to Health Care

- Many lesbians put off receiving health care services because they are afraid of discrimination, or because of a negative experience they have encountered in the past.
- Some lesbians fear a breach of confidentiality of their sexual orientation with health care providers.
- Some health care providers make inaccurate assumptions or have misinformation about the possible health risks and needs of patients who are lesbians.

- Lesbians experience a lack of health insurance coverage mostly because they cannot be covered under spousal benefits.
- Some health care providers are uncomfortable with asking questions and getting information that is necessary.
- Out of fear of discrimination lesbian women may not reveal important information to health care providers.
- Revealing information that is of sexual content can cause a lot of anxiety.

IX. Tips for Health Care Providers

- It is important to remember that sexual orientation does not always predict behavior.
- Be familiar with resources that are in your community so that you can provide information of further support to your patients.
- It is important to remember that it is difficult for lesbian patients to share information because of fear of discrimination. Monitor your body language and verbal responses to be sensitive to this.
- Ensure your patients that their confidentiality is going to be kept and let them know who will have access to their personal information.
- To provide optimal care it is important to be aware of the salient issues in the lesbian culture. Attending trainings for ongoing education and skill building can increase awareness.
- Actively listen to your patients. They may reveal important information in a subtle or an indirect way.
- Avoid making assumptions by asking open-ended questions.
- Encourage open discussions with patients to establish rapport and obtain pertinent medical information.
- Take responsibility for mistakes that you make in conversations with your patients, so that together you can move forward in their treatment.
- Be aware of your personal biases to prevent the patient from having a negative experience.
- Learn the different symbols for gay, lesbian, and transgendered people.
- Paperwork should have language that is inclusive of the gay, lesbian, and transgendered community.
- Having materials present that show support of the gay community such as posters or magazines can help lesbian patients to be more comfortable.

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