

Chapter 10 - Case Studies

Case Study 10.1

AIDS: Believing in Dangerous Myths

Each of the following statements represents a myth about AIDS. Explain why you think each one is a myth, and identify one or two dangerous outcomes that could occur from people believing the myth to be true.

1. AIDS is a homosexual disease. Gay men and lesbians are the cause of this disease so if you simply avoid gay men and lesbians you can't get it.
 2. Since we know AIDS is a homosexual disease and gay men are a high-risk group, lesbians must also be a high-risk group.
 3. Gay men and lesbians are continuing to spread the HIV virus through their irresponsible, promiscuous sexual behavior.
 4. Since all gay men and lesbians are white, people of color don't have to worry about AIDS as long as they don't use drugs.
 5. The main reason people of color get AIDS is because the vast majority of IV drug users are people of color, so they get the disease from using shared needles.
 6. Since they are a low risk group, people of color can learn all they need to know about AIDS through the general media.
 7. We know the AIDS epidemic started in Africa so Africans are to blame for it.
 8. Because the vaginal wall is more protected than the anal wall, heterosexual women aren't as likely to get infected by the HIV virus and are a low risk group.
 9. Drug users will not change their unsafe behavior because they don't care if they live or die; therefore, it is impossible to change IV drug users behavior with educational efforts.
-

Explanation for AIDS: Believing in Dangerous Myths— Reality and Danger

1. AIDS is a homosexual disease. Gay men and lesbians are the cause of this disease so if you simply avoid gay men and lesbians you can't get it.

Reality: AIDS is a virus and does not discriminate. In some countries the primary transmission has been heterosexual contact. In the U.S. the virus was first introduced in the gay population, and AIDS has spread through the use of shared needles and sexual contact with exposed individuals. The virus is transmitted by anyone who carries it, regardless of their sexual orientation or their gender.

Danger: Heterosexuals will not recognize their risk nor practice safer sex. Gay men and lesbians may be persecuted or even segregated.

2. Since we know AIDS is a homosexual disease and gay men are a high-risk group, lesbians must also be a high-risk group.

Reality: Lesbians are the lowest risk group of all sexually active populations due to the lack of exposure and less exchange of potentially infected body fluids.

Danger: Discrimination against lesbians (e.g. higher insurance rates, violence, etc.)

3. Gay men and lesbians are continuing to spread the HIV virus through their irresponsible, promiscuous sexual behavior.

Reality: Some gay men have many sexual partners, as do many straight men. Studies have shown a significant decrease in the number of sexually transmitted diseases among gay men. The decrease suggests an increase in the use of safe sex practices.

Danger: Gays will be scapegoats and persecuted for being perceived as irresponsible.

4. Since all gay men and lesbians are white, people of color don't have to worry about AIDS as long as they don't use drugs.

Reality: Sexual orientation is a fact for all human beings, and a certain percentage (no matter what their skin color) is going to be exclusively homosexual. People of color are at risk for AIDS just like anyone else.

Danger: Due to the risk of being alienated from their racial/ethnic group, people of color may be even less likely to be openly gay nor to seek medical help if they think they have contracted AIDS

5. The main reason people of color get AIDS is because the vast majority of IV drug users are people of color, so they are get the disease from using shared needles.

Reality: This is a stereotype for people of color. There is no evidence to support the idea that the vast majority of IV drug users are people of color.

Danger: This belief justifies negative attitudes and behavior toward people of color.

6. Since they are a low risk group, people of color can learn all they need to know about AIDS through the general media.

Reality: Special education and services are required to reach communities of color. While many may have some exposure to information via the media, additional culturally targeted information is essential to reach people of color effectively.

Danger: Information and services on AIDS may be seen as not applying to communities of color resulting in these communities becoming a higher risk.

7. We know the AIDS epidemic started in Africa so Africans are to blame for it.

Reality: The HIV virus should be “blamed” for the epidemic. The virus could have originated anywhere. The important point is that AIDS exists, and the important question is “What are we going to do to stop AIDS or prevent AIDS?”

Danger: All Black people may be blamed and suffer discrimination and persecution. Blaming Blacks may also cause Black people to be legitimately offended and refuse to listen to educational efforts about AIDS.

8. Because the vaginal wall is more protected than the anal wall, heterosexual women aren’t as likely to get infected by the HIV virus and are a low risk group.

Reality: Women have been infected by HIV; in some countries as many as 50% of people with AIDS are women. Women are at risk if they engage in high-risk behaviors: (1) having sex with bisexual men or IV drug users, (2) being an IV drug user.

Danger: Women may engage in unsafe sex. Services and policies may be implemented that don’t reflect the needs of women.

9. Drug users will not change their unsafe behavior because they don’t care if they live or die; therefore, it is impossible to change IV drug users behavior with educational efforts.

Reality: Although more research is needed, there is evidence that IV drug users will respond to educational efforts geared specifically for their needs and interests.

Danger: No attempt will be made to research this issue, and the lack of information will lead to increased risk of exposure to AIDS and the death.

Source: Seattle Office for Women’s Rights

Critical Thinking Questions:

As you review the myths that you knew and had correct information about, explain how you got that information. Would you agree or disagree that more Americans today are receiving accurate information about AIDS? Explain.

Select two of the myths about AIDS described above that you think have the most dangerous implications for our society and explain why.

Case Study 10.2

Reasons why Homosexual Couples in the United States Should not have the Legal Right to Marry

1. Homosexuality is not natural; God made Adam and Eve not Adam and Steve.
2. Heterosexual marriages are legitimate and accepted because they produce children, and children need to have a mother and a father in the home as role models for how men and women are supposed to behave in society.
3. If we allow homosexual marriage then the next step will be for homosexuals to raise children because lesbians can be artificially inseminated or a homosexual couple could adopt children. Homosexual couples should not be allowed to raise children because they will promote homosexuality in those children.
4. Heterosexual marriage has been around a long time with very few changes and this represents a radical change in what we think of as marriage that is unacceptable to the vast majority of Americans.
5. We should not let the courts decide about the legitimacy of homosexual marriages, but rather let the people decide because America is a democracy and in a democracy the majority should be able to get what it wants.
6. The Bible does not support homosexual marriage nor does any Christian church or denomination in the United States. America is a religious country and its religious values should not be compromised.
7. Legalizing homosexual marriage will open the door to all kinds of crazy behavior. People might even wish to marry their pets or have sex with their children. Are we just going to say “anything goes” and permit any perverted behavior?

Critical Thinking Question:

1. Select two of the reasons given above and refute them.
2. Why is there so much resistance and against accepting gay men and lesbians in American society, and why is there so much verbal abuse and gay bashing?

Case Study 10.3

Homophobia on a College Campus

The Context:

You are an African American male. As you were growing up, you met a number of gay men and lesbians; in particular, your uncle who is a lawyer and your older sister's best friend and business partner. You know them both to be decent and interesting people who have always been kind and respectful toward you. You have mixed feelings about their sexual orientation, but you like them both and respect their right to live their lives however they choose. During your freshman year in college, you heard a gay speaker argue that when a society allows verbal harassment of gays and lesbians it makes gay bashing more likely, and in general creates a harmful environment that encourages disrespectful treatment of gays and lesbians and even discrimination against them. You are inclined to agree with this argument because of the research you did in a sociology class for a paper on hate crimes that addressed the issue of gay bashing.

The Situation:

It is the middle of fall semester of your sophomore year. You are living in a residence hall and have gotten to know most of the people on your floor. A rumor has been going around for the past week that two men who are roommates on your floor are gay. When one of the men on the floor confronted them with the rumor, the roommates did not deny that they were gay, but they said it was nobody's business but theirs. People had told occasional "fag" jokes in the past, but now the men on the dorm floor told such jokes every day and many consistently called the two roommates "fags" or "faggots" or "queers." The epithets and jokes became routine and increasingly hostile, often followed by someone talking about the need to "do something." You have warned people making threats that they could get into trouble if they do anything, and you believe that their hostility will diminish as time goes on. But it doesn't. Before long a couple of men begin calling the two roommates "fags" and "queers" to their face and taunting them. Signs appear in the bathrooms and hallways saying "Queer Alert" or "Beware: Fags on the Premises." On the way back to the residence hall after lunch, some of the men from your floor are walking with you and they complain about "having to put up with faggots" on their floor and they say they plan to continue harassing them until the two men finally leave. One man says he thinks the best way to get rid of them is to watch for them coming back from class and beat them up.

Critical Thinking Questions:

1. Are you willing to confront the men from your residence hall individually? Explain why or why not. If you decide to confront them, will you approach them individually or as a group, and what will you say to them?
2. Another option would be to report the homophobic behavior of the men from your residence hall to the Residence Hall director and or other authority figures. Are you willing to do that only if no one knows you came forward? Explain. Are there other options that you would be willing to try?