

HOMOSEXUALITY IN ADOLESCENTS: ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In their *Handbook of Child and Adolescent Sexual Problems*, psychiatrists Michael S. Lundy and George A. Rekers offer guidelines that are helpful to schools and parents in considering with the sensitive question of teen homosexual orientation. Lundy is a former Medical Director at Duke University's Medical Center; Rekers is Research Director for Adolescent Psychiatry at the University of South Carolina's School of Medicine.

They point out that "roughly 99% of adolescents are destined to develop a conventional heterosexual orientation." They caution that a school's effort to create a safe environment for all students should avoid practices that may lead an adolescent to prematurely self-identify as homosexual and to initiate high-risk sexual activity based on that self-identification. They write:

An uninformed overemphasis on 'self-determination' that fails to present an adolescent with true and informed choices can lead to prematurely and inappropriately burdening an adolescent with the label 'homosexual'—a process that tends to produce unfortunate self-fulfilling results.

Even those who are advocates of an increased legitimacy of homosexual lifestyles will find common ground with those more comfortable with mere 'toleration.' This commonality may be found in the desirability of guiding young people away from premature sexuality and from early choices that may greatly restrict and lower the quality of subsequent choices.

Professionals who serve children, adolescents, and their families need to remember that the locus of the contemporary controversy over the acceptance or rejection of traditional evaluations of homosexual behavior is between political factions at the societal level. However, there is virtually no controversy among parents, who nearly universally desire a heterosexual outcome for their own child.

The ethical burden of proof is on helping professionals who would be tempted to impose their own political values regarding homosexuality on a child or adolescent against the desires of that minor's legal guardian(s). Instead, attention should be paid to the following considerations:

1. There are life-threatening risks associated with early onset of homosexual behavior.
2. There is a pervasive and emotionally charged controversy over the homosexual lifestyle (compared to the pervasive social support for heterosexual marriage and a chaste lifestyle).
3. There are significant psychological risks of premature sexual involvement.