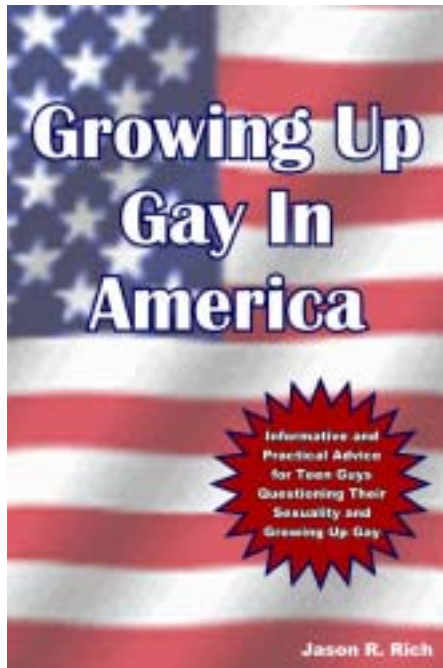
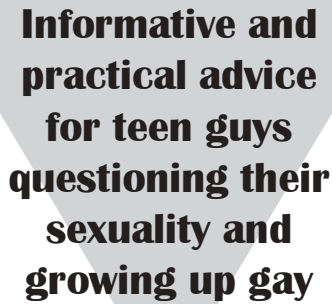


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Growing Up Gay In America



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Growing Up Gay In America



**Informative and
practical advice
for teen guys
questioning their
sexuality and
growing up gay**

Jason R. Rich

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Shout Out America

Q: What advice do you have for guys first coming out or coming to terms with their sexuality?

"It is very hard to come out. I am still having a hard time dealing with it. Once you do, there's no turning back, so think things through carefully."

- Alex, 23, McAllen, TX

"Know that you're not the only gay teenager out there. There are many other people that feel as afraid, depressed or confused as you do. Be yourself. It's much harder to try to be someone you're not."

- Josh, 18, Atlanta, GA

"Don't get into a long-term relationship too early. Also, stay away from much older guys. They are everywhere and will want you just because you're young. Finally, always practice safe sex. Most importantly, have fun!"

- Dave, 28, South Beach, FL

"Just be yourself. If you know you're gay, bi or whatever, don't be scared!"

- Luke, 18, Erie, PA

"Be true to yourself. Don't try to 'fake it' by pursuing the opposite sex. Do without if you are uncomfortable. Involving a fake girlfriend in your cover-up and ultimately hurting her is tragic."

- Erik, 31, Atlanta, GA

"Be honest with yourself and others. Also, be proud of yourself!"

- Joseph, 21, Windsor Locks, CT

"Don't be naive. Older and/or more experienced guys may try to take advantage of you sexually. Don't let them. Stay out of compromising positions and never get drunk with people you don't know."

- Aaron, 17, New York, NY

"Live it! Be it! Love it! Shape your life and personality based on your experiences. You'll learn a lot along the way. It's a long road, but be strong. You will survive! It's a wonderful life."

- Tristan, 19, Los Angeles



Introduction

Growing Up Gay In America

As a teenager, you're probably filled with questions, strong emotions, raging hormones, a wide range of desires and countless challenges in your daily life. Well, guess what...that's normal!

But, have your sexual thoughts, urges and desires been focusing more on other guys as opposed to girls? Have you begun questioning your sexual orientation? Are you thinking perhaps you might be gay or bisexual, or that something is wrong with you?

As a result, are you confused, scared, lonely, or depressed because you're too embarrassed or ashamed to talk to others about what you're feeling and experiencing?

Whatever you're going through, be assured you're not alone! You're also *not* abnormal, a freak, a sexual deviant or "sick in the head" – no matter what people may tell you or what you might think.

It's common for young guys to be curious and/or experiment sexually. So, the feelings you're having don't automatically mean you're gay or even bisexual.

While there are no truly accurate statistics about the size of America's gay population, one estimate is that between five and six percent of America's youth (people under the age of 18) consider themselves to be gay, bisexual or lesbian. This translates to upwards of **2,700,000** young people in America who don't believe themselves to be straight.

If you do happen to be gay (or bisexual), do you truly understand what this means, or do you buy into the negative and incorrect stereotypes about homosexuality and the gay community? Try to keep an open mind as you begin to understand what

you're feeling and experiencing.

In America, and throughout the world, people tend to be categorized into stereotypes. The less people know and understand about other people, the crueler and less accurate the stereotypes tend to be. Let's face it, being gay is something that most people don't understand, and many don't accept. This doesn't change the fact that one out of ten people in America is gay.

So, if you're gay, bisexual or still questioning your sexuality, you're not alone. This topic isn't something most teen guys choose to talk about openly, especially with straight friends, family members, religious leaders and teachers.

What Does It Mean To Be Gay?

Well, that's a tough question. The generic answer is that a guy who is **gay** is sexually attracted to other guys, not girls. Someone who is **bisexual** is attracted to both guys and girls. When it comes to discovering more about who you are, forget about titles and stereotypes.

Whether you're openly gay and have accepted yourself as being gay, or you're confused about your sexuality because of feelings you may have for other guys, it's common to feel alone, confused, scared and maybe even disgusted with yourself. Chances are, the concept of being gay goes against everything you've been taught and perhaps the religious or family values you've grown up with. Yet, you can't deny the thoughts, feelings, dreams and urges you have.

A guy who is "gay" is primarily sexually attracted to other guys...**not** girls.

If you're currently questioning your sexuality, you're about to confront one of the scariest and confusing aspects of your life. While straight guys sometimes experiment with other guys,

yet grow up to lead “straight” lives, there are certainly plenty of young guys, typically between the ages of 12 and 24, who know in their hearts they’re gay or bisexual. They are forced to come to terms with who they are, and then decide whether or not they want to share this revelation with those around them. These days, young guys are realizing that they’re gay very early in life, and many are coming out in their early teens.

Is Being Gay A Choice? Nope!

Most people don’t wake up one morning and say, “Gee, being gay looks cool. I’m going to fall in love with a guy today and have sex by nightfall.” Many people believe homosexuality is a choice... They’re wrong! It’s not typically a conscious decision to be gay or bisexual. Yet, there’s no proof that being gay is hereditary (passed on through genes from your parents or grandparents). While you probably didn’t choose to be gay, leading an openly gay life (where you come out to your friends and family, for example), is a decision you may or may not choose to make at this point in your life.

Someone who is comfortable with his sexuality and doesn’t hide the fact he’s gay is considered *openly gay*, while someone who keeps his sexual orientation and feelings a secret is considered to be *in the closet*. For someone who is gay, there are many misconceptions you’ll need to deal with. There are also questions you’ll need accurate answers to as you attempt to understand yourself, your feelings and your emotions.

While everyone’s experience is unique, many gay guys face similar questions, issues and fears. Everyone has his own issues and fears to deal with and overcome. Unfortunately, this book can’t supply you with all of the answers you need. Nor can it guarantee that no matter what your sexual preference is, your life will be happy and “normal.” That’s up to you!

What this book does offer, however, are answers to common questions; advice for dealing with many of the issues and

situations you'll face as you confront your sexuality; and plenty of resources that will allow you to share your feelings, thoughts and fears with others who are in exactly the same situation.

Don't worry, you're not about to be preached to or lectured at in this book! What you'll read is advice and information from

people who have been through or who are going through the exact same thing as you are right now.



Photo (c) 2002 Mark V. Lynch, Latent Images

If you learn nothing else from this book, you need to know that whatever you're going through, you're not alone! Even if you're afraid to discuss your sexuality openly at this point in your life, you can still communicate with others anonymously on the phone, online or through the mail. No matter how confused or scared you may be about the feelings, thoughts and urges you have, the trick to feeling

better about yourself and building up your confidence is to communicate with others who understand your situation and who will support you.

Unfortunately, there are many people who simply don't understand or accept homosexuals. These people are homophobic and lack basic compassion and understanding. Not everyone, however, is homophobic. As you go through life, if you

Whether you realize it or not, millions of gay Americans lead happy, healthy and extremely successful lives. There's nothing stopping you from becoming one of these people!

put in some effort, you'll be able to surround yourself with friends and loved ones who accept you, support you and care for you. It doesn't matter where you live, what ethnic background you come from or how much money you have. There are plenty of ways you can get the support you need and your questions answered!

Before you can expect others to accept you, the first step is to accept yourself. This book helps you come to terms with yourself as a person, then assists you in surrounding yourself with people who will support and accept you. *Growing Up Gay In America* provides you with the information you need to successfully overcome the obstacles you'll encounter at various points in your life.

The key to success is to face each obstacle and challenge with the right information – accurate information. Providing you with this needed practical information is the primary goal of this book.

In the past few years, the public's apparent acceptance and awareness of gays has increased. This has become apparent from popular television shows, like *The Real World*, *Dawson's Creek*, *Six Feet Under*, *Will & Grace*, *OZ* and *Queer As Folk*. These, and other shows like them, have gay-oriented storylines and characters, yet are watched and enjoyed by millions of mainstream (straight) Americans.

Whatever's going through your mind right now, be patient, be open-minded and don't be afraid!

Despite what you see on these and other television shows, keep in mind that this is mostly fiction. While there is certainly a portion of the gay population that's into the club scene and that leads stereotypical sexually promiscuous lives (as sometimes depicted by several characters on *Queer As Folk*, for example), you don't have to be part of this group in order to be gay, nor do you have to become a cross-dresser, wear make-up, dress in tight-fitting clothing or become flamboyant.

Hey, you don't even need to listen to Madonna, Britney Spears or Barbara Streisand. As you'll soon discover, there are a growing number of support groups, magazines, books and resources (both online and in the real world) that you can anonymously take advantage of as you begin to explore your sexuality and understand what it means to be young and gay in America.

Gather the information you need, get your questions answered and then make whatever decisions are required for you to live the life you want to lead. If you truly want to be happy,

In this book, you'll discover how and where to meet other gay friends, how to deal with society's views on homosexuals, and how to deal with the various issues you're sure to encounter as you get older.

you'll ultimately need to make the decisions that are right for you. Unfortunately, you can't rely on parents, friends, loved ones, religious leaders, doctors, psychologists or anyone else to make these decisions for you. Likewise, it's totally your decision as to who

you share your thoughts, feelings and desires with.

Each chapter of this book explores a different aspect of gay life and what it means to be gay and growing up in America. The first few chapters deal with issues, like determining whether or not you're actually gay; "coming out;" and dealing with your parents and relatives. If you are actually gay, much of what's in this book will help you live a safe, happy, healthy and prosperous life, develop relationships (yes, get a boyfriend), enjoy *safe* sex and plan for your future.

Simply by setting your hands on this book, you've taken a giant step toward better understanding what being young and gay (or bisexual) is all about.

Remember, no matter what your personal situation is, how scared, confused or depressed you might be, you're not alone!

Growing Up Gay In America

This book will show you how you can easily find people who will understand and support you, who you can talk to (or communicate with), and who will assist you in overcoming whatever obstacles are in your way. Even if you choose to begin this personal journey on your own, this book will help you gather the courage and information you'll need and want.

In between each chapter, you'll see *Shout Out America* pages filled with quotes from teens (ages 15 to 25), just like you, from across America. These people have managed to come to terms with their sexuality and in many cases have overcome the challenges involved in coming out to friends and family. The advice and insight these people share is extremely valuable, as are the various other resources this book recommends.

Finally, while there's no shortage of psycho-babble, statistics and so-called "experts" who have opinions on what being gay is all about, you'll find very little of that stuff here. Instead, much of what you'll read comes directly from young people like yourself, from all over the country, who have firsthand experience growing up gay in America. It's from these people you can obtain a pretty accurate picture of what gay life is really all about and how wonderful being gay can actually be.

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About The Author

Jason R. Rich is a newspaper and magazine columnist. He's also the author of more than 25 books on a wide range of topics, including: career-related issues, the Internet, travel, computer/video games, the paranormal, organization, goal setting and surviving college.

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About The Photographer

Mark V. Lynch is the president of Latent Images Photography in Austin, Texas. He's been working as a professional photographer for over 20 years.

"The models I shoot are not professionals. Without their talent and dedication, my work would not be possible," states Mark.

If you enjoyed the photos of the hot guys throughout this book, you can thank Mark for so generously providing them. Want to see more? Be sure to check out his Web site at www.latentimages.com. You can also email Mark at mark@latentimages.com. (Sorry, he won't give out the models' phone numbers.)

**Check out this book's official Web site at:
www.Growing-Up-Gay.com**