

Heterosexuals react better when gays and lesbians 'come out' early

September 8 2015, by Robert Burgin



Same-sex attracted people are justified in mentioning their partner's gender early in a conversation, as it could prevent people from becoming fixated on sexuality and deeming it a defining characteristic.

These were among the findings of a study by University of Queensland School of Psychology researchers Dr Sharon Dane, Associate Professor Barbara Masser and Associate Professor Julie Duck.

"In releasing our results we acknowledge 'coming out' is a very personal

decision and one which involves an assessment of risk," Dr Dane said.

"We tested whether heterosexuals reacted more positively if they learnt a person was gay or lesbian if this information was casually divulged early or if it was revealed after getting to know the person better.

"Results showed heterosexual participants liked the gay or lesbian person more, sat closer to them, were more willing to introduce them to friends and meet them alone if sexuality was established earlier.

"On the other hand, those who only found out after getting to know the gay or lesbian person better appeared to become fixated by this information and consider it as a defining quality."

Dr Dane and Dr Masser stressed their study, *When 'In Your Face' Is Not Out Of Place*, should not be used to advise people about revealing their sexual identity, as every case differed.

Instead, their research of 478 heterosexual men and women, published in journal *PLOS One* with University of Toronto co-author Associate Professor Geoff MacDonald, focused on the reactive tendencies of the wider population.

"Heterosexuals inadvertently 'come out' early all the time, and I believe this is linked to the way they responded in our test," Dr Dane said.

"A woman can make a casual comment to colleagues that she 'had to catch the train today, because my husband took the car keys'.

"Although her sexuality is not the topic of conversation, it becomes clear to everyone listening that the person is in a relationship with someone of the opposite sex."

In their earlier nationwide study, "Not So Private Lives," Dr Dane and Dr Masser found that same-sex attracted Australians preferred to 'come out' early in non-work-related social encounters, provided the disclosure was relevant to the conversation.

Dr Dane said that one of the unexplored benefits of [same-sex marriage](#) was the ease with which same-sex couples could simply refer to their ' husband' or ' wife' to facilitate early disclosure.

She said positive heterosexual reactions to 'coming out' early were encouraging, given the well-documented negative health consequences of keeping sexuality hidden.

More information: "When 'In Your Face' Is Not Out of Place: The Effect of Timing of Disclosure of a Same-Sex Dating Partner under Conditions of Contact." *PLoS ONE* 10(8): e0135023. [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0135023](#)

"Not So Private Lives," [espace.library.uq.edu.au/view/...ate_Lives_Report.pdf](#)

Provided by University of Queensland

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