

A SUMMARY OF

IDENTITY REPORTS

| A COLLEGE STUDENT IS FORCED TO MOVE AFTER INFORMING HIS ROOMMATE HE IS GAY | A STUDENT IS PHYSICALLY ASSAULTED BECAUSE HE IS THOUGHT TO BE GAY | A WOMAN IS DENIED EMPLOYMENT WHEN THE EMPLOYER LEARNS SHE IS A MEMBER OF A GAY ORGANIZATION | A SCHOOL DISTRICT REMOVES A LESBIAN TEACHER FROM THE CLASSROOM | MEN IN A CAR HARASS A GAY COUPLE WALKING HAND-IN-HAND | A WOMAN IS EVICTED FROM HER APARTMENT AFTER SHE LETS THE OWNER KNOW SHE IS A LESBIAN | A GAY SERVICEMAN IS HARASSED, THREATENED, AND RAPED BY OTHERS IN HIS UNIT | A STAFF MEMBER OF A GAY/LESBIAN AGENCY RECEIVES A BOMB THREAT | A WOMAN IS NOT ALLOWED TO CONTINUE TRAININGS FOR A BUSINESS AFTER MANAGEMENT FINDS OUT SHE IS A LESBIAN | A BOOKSTORE EMPLOYEE IS FIRED AFTER HER MANAGER DISCOVERS SHE IS A LESBIAN | THREE ROLLER RINKS REFUSE TO RENT FACILITIES TO A CHURCH GROUP AFTER THEY DISCOVER IT IS A LESBIAN/GAY GROUP | A LANDLORD DECLINES TO RENT TO AN AGENCY WHICH SERVES THE GAY AND LESBIAN PUBLIC | A WOMAN IS REFUSED REHIRE BECAUSE OF HER "PERSONAL LIFESTYLE" | A LESBIAN CAPRENTER IS FIRED BECAUSE HER EMPLOYER WANTS TO "PROTECT THE COMPANY" | A MINISTER IS FORCED TO RESIGN BECAUSE OF HIS ACTIVITIES ON BEHALF OF LESBIANS AND GAY MEN | A SUPERVISOR REFUSES TO WORK WITH A REPRESENTATIVE WHO IS GAY | A CITY ADMINISTRATOR REFUSES TO FUND A SOCIAL SERVICE AGENCY BECAUSE IT SERVES THE GAY/LESBIAN POPULATION | THE PUBLISHERS OF A CITY DIRECTORY REFUSE TO PLACE A GAY ORGANIZATION LISTING | A NEWSPAPER REFUSES AN ADVERTISEMENT FOR A GAY/LESBIAN PHONE COUNSELING SERVICE | A GAY MAN IS MURDERED AND THE KILLER GETS A ONE-YEAR PRISON SENTENCE | A GAY STUDENT IS ATTACKED BY ANOTHER STUDENT IN CLASS WITH A BASEBALL BAT | A BARTENDER LOSES HIS JOB AFTER PATRONS ACCUSE HIM OF BEING GAY | FOUNDERS OF A GAY/LESBIAN SUPPORT GROUP ARE HARASSED BY PHONE | A SUCCESSFUL APPLICANT TO A STATE COMMISSION IS DENIED THE JOB AFTER THE HIRING COMMITTEE FINDS OUT SHE IS A LESBIAN | A LESBIAN COUPLE IS THREATENED PHYSICALLY BY AN EX-BOYFRIEND OF ONE OF THE COUPLE | A YOUTH COUNSELOR IS NOT ALLOWED TO WORK WITH CLIENTS OUTSIDE WORK WHEN HIS SUPERVISOR BECOMES AWARE OF HIS WORK WITH A LOCAL GAY ORGANIZATION | A RESORT REFUSES TO RENT THEIR FACILITY TO A THEATER COMPANY THAT PRESENTS PLAYS WITH GAY AND LESBIAN CHARACTERS | A GAY BAR IS EVACUATED AFTER SOMEONE THROWS IN A SMOKE BOMB | GAY STUDENTS AT A UNIVERISTY CAMPUS ARE HARASSED BY THE "ANTI-FAG SOCIETY" | A BOY IS FORCIBLY REMOVED FROM A TEEN CLUB WHEN HE DID NOT DANCE WITH GIRLS | TWO FEMALE SOLDIERS ARE DISCHARGED FROM THE MILITARY FOR "HOMOSEXUAL TENDENCIES" | A TEAR-GAS CANISTER IS THROWN INTO THE ROOM WHERE A MAJOR GAY COMMUNITY EVENT IS HELD | A DATING SERVICE ADVERTISES THAT IT IS "EXCLUSIVELY FOR PEOPLE INTERESTED IN THE OPPOSITE SEX" | A GAY MAN IS GANG-RAPED WHEN HITCH-HIKING |

SEXUAL ORIENTATION BIAS IN ALASKA

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IDENTITY INCORPORATED
ANCHORAGE ALASKA 1989

SUMMARY

IDENTITY REPORTS

SEXUAL ORIENTATION BIAS IN ALASKA

BACKGROUND

Identity Reports: Sexual Orientation Bias in Alaska is the research complement to the profile of the gay and lesbian community in Alaska called *One in Ten* (Identity, 1986). *Identity Reports* was designed to explore issues of sexual orientation bias that *One in Ten* did not address. From early 1987 through the spring of 1988, researchers gathered information from surveys, public records, and personal interviews in Anchorage, Fairbanks, Juneau, and other communities in Alaska. Their findings are the source for the three papers which make up *Identity Reports*.

The first paper, *Coming Out: Issues Surrounding Disclosure of Sexual Orientation*, is largely based upon review of *One in Ten* and research conducted by professors at the University of Chicago. It discusses some of the factors influencing individual choices about coming out (or disclosing one's sexual orientation) to others, as well as the possible consequences of these choices — particularly in relation to discrimination and mental health.

The second paper, *Closed Doors: Sexual Orientation Bias in the Anchorage Housing and Employment Markets*, reviews the first published findings from two questionnaires designed to assess attitudes of a random sampling of 191 Anchorage employers and 178 landlords toward homosexual employees and tenants. The paper also explores the association between personal acquaintance with homosexuals and attitudes towards them.

The third, *Prima Facie: Documented Cases of Sexual Orientation Bias in Alaska* presents a chronicle of 84 incidents of sexual orientation bias collected through personal interviews and written accounts from newspapers, court records, and private files. These case histories, ranging from verbal abuse to employment and housing discrimination to assault and murder, speak to the personal consequences of sexual orientation bias in Alaska.

MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE REPORT

COMING OUT (Statewide report)

On the average, gay and lesbian Alaskans first recognize their sexual orientation at the age of 12.5 years, but do not disclose their sexual orientation to others until they are 20.1 years old, a difference of nearly eight years. Even in adulthood, only about half of their parents are told, and only two-thirds of their sisters and brothers. Co-workers, employers and supervisors, and neighbors are even less likely to be told.

Lesbians and gay men in Alaska are frequently unwilling to come out to others because they fear discrimination or other sanctions. Fifty-three percent feel their communities are unsafe to live in openly as gay men or lesbians; 23% feel that they would be fired or laid off if their employers or supervisors learned of their sexual orientation.

Gay men and lesbians who are more out tend to experience discrimination more readily than those who are closeted, and are more likely to settle for low-paying, low-status jobs where their sexual orientation will not present an issue. Seventy-one percent of lesbian and gay Alaskans have experienced one or more forms of discrimination, harassment, or violence because of their sexual orientation while living in Alaska. Sanctions due to sexual orientation bias may come family members as well as non-family members. Gay and lesbian youth, or youth perceived to be gay or lesbian, may also be at risk for verbal abuse, threats, and violence in their schools.

Highly closeted gay men and lesbians are more likely to enjoy the benefits of high-paying, high-status jobs than are openly gay or lesbian individuals, but they also experience more problems with alienation, depression, low self-esteem, and conflicts about their sexual orientation.

"I HOPE TO BE ABLE TO BE MUCH MORE OPEN SOMEDAY! LIFE WOULD BE SO MUCH EASIER IF I NEVER HAD TO THINK ABOUT SOMEONE'S REACTION TO MY LESBIANISM."

—One in Ten respondent

"I AM CLOSETED BECAUSE I FEAR [DISCRIMINATION] . . . IT IS A TERRIBLE AND UNFAIR EXISTENCE."

—One in Ten respondent

"I WILL NEVER WORK WITH OR KNOWINGLY ASSOCIATE WITH ANY HOMOSEXUAL."

—An Anchorage employer

"THERE IS NO NEED FOR THESE LAWS. IF SOMEBODY IS UNWELCOME THEY WILL NOT WANT TO LIVE IN THAT RESIDENCE OBVIOUSLY."

—An Anchorage landlord

"ABSOLUTELY NO OBJECTION [TO RENTING] — I KNOW SEVERAL HOMOSEXUAL MEN AND WOMEN AND LOVE THEM DEARLY. . ."

—An Anchorage landlord

"IF THERE IS DISCRIMINATION, THEN THERE SHOULD BE LAWS AGAINST IT."

—An Anchorage landlord

A WOMAN IS NOT INVITED BACK AS A TRAINER AT A SCHOOL AFTER A COUNSELOR THERE LEARNS SHE IS A LESBIAN

Case No. 29

Stress caused by the experience of discrimination or other sanctions, or fear of these sanctions, may lead to negative coping styles such as abuse of alcohol or other drugs. Thirty-five percent of lesbian and gay Alaskans are at risk for problem drinking. Fear of sanctions may act as an obstacle for lesbians and gay men who seek help from mental health providers or self-help groups.

Sixty-four percent of gay and lesbian Alaskans believe that, "Equal rights and opportunities for lesbians and gay men can only be achieved when we 'come out of the closet' in greater numbers." Fifty-one percent see advocacy for a lesbian/gay equal rights bill as the service from which they would most benefit as gay and lesbian Alaskans.

CLOSED DOORS (Anchorage report)

Thirty-seven percent of Alaska's gay and lesbian population has experienced employment or housing discrimination while living in Alaska.

Thirty-one percent of Anchorage employers would either not hire, promote or would fire someone they had reason to believe was homosexual in their employ. Twenty percent of Anchorage landlords would either not rent to or would evict someone they had reason to believe was homosexual.

Twenty-three percent of Anchorage employers stated that their company has a written policy of non-discrimination including sexual orientation and 8% said they have homosexual employees. Eight percent of Anchorage landlords stated that they have a written policy of non-discrimination including sexual orientation and 18% said they currently have homosexual tenants.

Forty-two percent of Anchorage employers have a friend or family member who is gay or lesbian while 39% of Anchorage landlords have a friend or family member who is gay or lesbian.

Among those Anchorage employers who did not have a friend or family member who was homosexual, 57% would not hire someone they thought to be homosexual, while fewer than one in seven (14%) of the employers who had homosexual friends or family members would not hire someone they thought to be homosexual. Among those Anchorage landlords who did not have a friend or family member who was homosexual, 34% would not rent to someone they thought to be homosexual, while fewer than one in ten (9%) of the landlords who had homosexual friends or family members would not rent to someone they thought to be homosexual.

Forty-three percent of Anchorage employers and landlords support an ordinance to protect homosexuals from discrimination in Anchorage (57% of both employers and landlords oppose this ordinance).

Sixty-four percent of the Anchorage employers and landlords who know lesbians or gay men personally support an ordinance prohibiting sexual orientation discrimination. In contrast, only 29% of the employers and landlords who do not know lesbians or gay men personally support such an ordinance.

PRIMA FACIE (Statewide report)

Eighty-four actual incidents of antigay bias, discrimination, harassment, or violence were recorded involving 30 men and 21 women in the Municipality of Anchorage, the City and Borough of Juneau, the Fairbanks North Star Borough, and in 10 other locales in Alaska. Incidents ranged from simple bias to discrimination in housing, employment, public accommodations, or other discrimination, to violation of fundamental constitutional rights, to verbal abuse, harassment, or threats, to assault, sexual assault, or murder.

The victims of sexual orientation bias were predominantly lesbians or gay men, but

A LESBIAN CARPENTER IS
FIRED BECAUSE HER EM-
PLOYER WANTS TO "PRO-
TECT THE COMPANY"

Case No. 57

A GAY STUDENT IS AS-
SAULTED BY ANOTHER STU-
DENT WIELDING A MACHETE
AND A BASEBALL BAT

Case No. D-15

heterosexuals who were wrongly assumed to be lesbian or gay were also victimized. Respondents generally experienced antigay bias because of an agent of bias' knowledge, or assumptions about their sexual orientation or because of the respondent's association with a lesbian/gay-related organization, activity, or issue, rather than for any other reason. However, agents of bias were sometimes reluctant to name sexual orientation as their reason for acting against respondents, despite the lack of legal protection against sexual orientation discrimination in Alaska.

Although it has been widely documented that antigay harassment, violence, and discrimination have increased in recent years in the U.S., at least partly due to "AIDS backlash," only one case of AIDS-related bias was presented. Nonetheless, the potential that AIDS will serve as an "excuse" or "permission" to discriminate against, harass, or commit violence against gay and lesbian Alaskans is quite real.

Discrimination was most likely to originate with agencies, institutions, or businesses, etc. while harassment and violence was most likely to originate with individuals acting alone or in concert with other individuals.

CONCLUSION

This report and its predecessor, *One in Ten*, document the existence of statewide bias and discrimination against gay men and lesbians living in Alaska. Knowing this bias exists, many gay and lesbian Alaskans attempt to hide their orientation from others in order to protect themselves from discrimination, violence, or harassment. This practice of hiding results in what could be called homosexual anonymity—an "invisibility" that cannot assure protection from discrimination for lesbians and gay men and that also contributes to harmful self-conflicts. In this environment, Alaska's gay and lesbian residents cannot enjoy the full benefits of citizenship.

In 1966 an Anchorage housing discrimination survey was prepared for the Alaska State Commission for Human Rights. That survey found that 55% of Anchorage landlords would not then rent to blacks or natives. The public reaction to this evidence was strong and effective—within several months, the Anchorage Human Relations Commission was created to monitor and confront discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, and ancestry. In 1989, *Identity Reports'* evidence of discrimination against gay men and lesbians is no less compelling, and laws to protect gay and lesbian citizens from intentional acts of discrimination are equally justified.

Consequently, a decision must be made. Alaskans must decide either to permit discrimination against lesbians and gay men or to confront that discrimination. Our decision will affect lesbian and gay Alaskans for years to come.