

Discussion Guide



Family Fundamentals

A Film by Arthur Dong



www.pbs.org/pov

Letter From The Filmmaker

UNITED STATES SUPREME COURT VOIDS TEXAS SODOMY LAW, JUNE 26, 2003:

From the Decision, by Justice Anthony Kennedy:

“...for centuries there have been powerful voices to condemn homosexual conduct as immoral. The condemnation has been shaped by religious beliefs, conceptions of right and acceptable behavior, and respect for the traditional family...These considerations do not answer the question before us, however. The issue is whether the majority may use the power of the state to enforce these views on the whole society through operation of the criminal law. Our obligation is to define the liberty of all, not to mandate our own moral code.”

From the Dissent, by Justice Antonin Scalia:

“The Texas statute undeniably seeks to further the belief of its citizens that certain forms of sexual behavior are ‘immoral and unacceptable’ -- the same interest furthered by criminal laws against fornication, bigamy, adultery, adult incest, bestiality, and obscenity...Today’s opinion is the product of a Court, which is the product of a law-profession culture, that has largely signed on to the so-called homosexual agenda, by which I mean the agenda promoted by some homosexual activists directed at eliminating the moral opprobrium that has traditionally attached to homosexual conduct.”

Dear Viewer,

Kennedy and Scalia’s opposing arguments offer the most striking examples to date of public and private debates regarding gay issues -- questions that have sparked fierce “culture wars” about whether homosexuality should be condemned, tolerated, or celebrated. With each skirmish, it becomes increasingly difficult for opposing groups to work together toward a common sense of social justice. Advocates of gay rights are confronted with the challenge of being regarded by their opponents as unruly, dangerous, and immoral. Conversely, those who oppose homosexuality have been viewed by gay rights proponents as fundamentally hateful and ignorant.

Family Fundamentals was motivated by a desire to address this deep divide. The film looks into the most universal of social institutions, the family, to explore interpersonal and ideological differences. It is not, however, a simplification of liberal versus conservative or secular versus religious, but instead, a two-way street where audiences can encounter opposing views in a thoughtful manner. I wanted to use personal stories as microcosms of the larger social and political struggles being fought in the public sphere and to offer a more compassionate perspective on an issue that continues to tear apart not only families, but also communities and our nation.

While there are certainly families that have resolved their differences, I chose the stories in *Family Fundamentals* precisely because they illustrated the difficult situations where intensely committed communities are in disagreement. I’m not interested in painting broad strokes; I’m not interested in presenting stereotypes. Particularly, I’m not interested in patronizing viewers. My films don’t tend to offer easy solutions, but rather, they’re more about asking hard-core questions, about encouraging audience members to participate in a dialogue and to perhaps seek answers on their own.

As a result of the recent U.S. Supreme Court decision to strike Texas sodomy law (and similar laws in 12 other states), public and private confrontations over homosexuality will persist with even greater intensity at places of worship, at school board meetings, in voting booths, in Congress, and in families -- this culture war is forging ahead for us all whether we chose to be a part of it or not. With *Family Fundamentals*, I hope to touch hearts and minds -- to plant the seeds of change that may make it possible for equal justice to prevail -- these internal actions are what I hope for at the very least.

Arthur Dong

LOS ANGELES, 2003

Table of Contents

4	Program Description
4	Key Issues
4	Potential Partners
5	Primary Figures
6	Glossary LGBT
7	Glossary Christian belief
9	Using This Guide
9	Planning an Event
10	Facilitating a Discussion
10	Preparing Yourself
11	Preparing the Group
12	General Discussion Questions
13	Discussion Questions
13	Political Issues
14	Interpersonal Issues
15	Religious Issues
16	Taking Action
17	Resources
20	Ordering the Film

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Introduction

In *Family Fundamentals*, filmmaker Arthur Dong poses and then attempts to answer a straightforward but highly charged question: “What happens when parents believe that their own kids represent the very element that will lead to the end of the human race?” In a revealing 74-minute documentary that carries the intimacies of a home movie, *Family Fundamentals* explores the complex dynamics of families where parents actively oppose homosexuality despite having gay children themselves. These families find that their private struggles place them at the vortex of the very public “culture wars” being waged in social, religious, and political spheres across the United States. Focusing on the experiences of three families, the film looks at the painful and loving relationships between parents and children who find themselves on the opposite sides of an issue that each defines as central to their lives and beliefs.

Key Issues

In examining the intersection between the personal and the political, *Family Fundamentals* provides an opportunity to explore not only basic debates over gay rights or biblical edicts on homosexuality, but also on religious pluralism, the role of religion in a secular democracy, the meaning of family values, and beliefs about parenting.

Potential Partners

Political groups, religious institutions, and LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual or transgender) organizations provide natural constituencies for a screening and discussion of *Family Fundamentals*. In addition, the following P.O.V. national partners may be interested in joining you in planning an event:

- **Evangelicals Concerned Western Region**
www.ecwr.org
- **Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG)**
www.pflag.com

If you are planning to bring together people from groups with opposing points of view, it may be helpful to convene your event at a neutral site. In many communities, the PBS station can provide such a space. In addition, many stations have outreach and/or education specialists who may be able to serve as project partners. Just call your station and ask for the outreach or education department.

Primary Figures

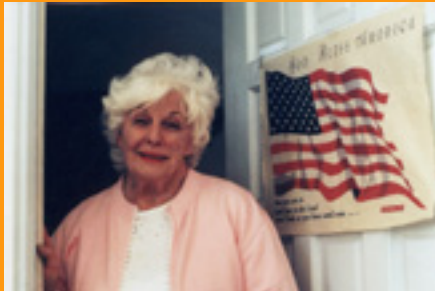


Photo: Arthur Dong

KATHLEEN BREMNER – Susan’s mother, David’s grandmother, and founder of a Christian ministry for parents with gay children



Photo: Arthur Dong

SUSAN JESTER – lesbian daughter of Pentecostal church leader Kathleen Bremner, and a political activist in progressive causes, including gay civil rights



Photo: David Jester

DAVID JESTER – Kathleen’s gay grandson and Susan’s son (shown above with Susan Jester)



Photo: Brett Mathews Collection

BRETT MATHEWS – Son of a Mormon bishop, former Navy First Lieutenant discharged for being gay, and board member of PFLAG-LA (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, Los Angeles)



Photo: Brian Bennett Collection

BRIAN BENNETT – Gay Republican who resided with and was regarded as a son by the Dornan family.
CONGRESSMAN BOB DORNAN – mentor to Brian Bennett and Conservative Republican politician especially known for opposition to gay rights



Photo: Arthur Dong

GUY FOTI – David’s partner

Mini Glossary

If you are dealing with the LGBT community in the U.S. today, you are likely to encounter the terms in this section.

bisexual – An individual who is romantically and physically attracted to both men and women.

gay – A term for describing people who are physically and/or romantically attracted to members of the same sex. Though the term is sometimes used to refer to both men and women, some feel that the term renders women’s unique experience as invisible, and prefer to use the term “gay” to refer to men and “lesbian” to refer to women.

gender – The linking of certain behaviors and characteristics to a particular biological sex (e.g., “being a man” as opposed to being male). External representation of one’s gender identity, usually expressed through “masculine” or “feminine” behavior, clothing, haircut, voice, or body characteristics.

heterosexism – The attitude that heterosexuality is the only valid sexual orientation.

homophobia – Any attitude, action or institutional structure which systematically treats an individual or group of individuals differently because of their sexual orientation. The most common forms of homophobia in North America are discrimination against homosexuals and bisexuals in employment, accommodation, ordination, church membership, and freedom to marry. A secondary meaning is the belief that persons of one sexual orientation – normally heterosexuality – are inherently superior to persons who have other orientations. A tertiary meaning is fear or loathing of persons with a specific sexual orientation.

lesbian – A woman whose primary physical, emotional and/or spiritual attraction is to other women.

LGBT – The acronym for “lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender.” LGBT is used because it is more inclusive of the community.

queer – Traditionally a pejorative term for non-heterosexuals, this has been appropriated by some lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people to describe themselves. Some value the term for its defiance and because it is inclusive – not only of lesbians and gay men but also of bisexuals and transgender people as well. Nevertheless, it is not universally used within the

varied LGBT communities; so a casual, “Hey there, queer,” especially if used by a non-LGBT person, may not be returned with friendly banter.

transgender – An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. For transgender people, their birth-assigned sex and their own internal sense of gender identity do not match. Typically, transgender people seek to make their gender expression match their gender identity, rather than their birth-assigned sex. The term may include but is not limited to: transsexuals, intersex people, cross-dressers, and other gender-variant people. Transgender people can be female-to-male (FTM) or male-to-female (MTF). Transgender people may or may not choose to alter their bodies.

transsexual – A person who has transitioned to live full-time as a gender other than the one assigned at birth (post-op), or someone who intends to transition in the future (pre-op). Many transsexuals alter their bodies hormonally and/or surgically to change their biological sex assignment.

transvestite – An increasingly historic term, more popularly referred to as a cross-dresser, a person who frequently or occasionally wears clothes or paraphernalia traditionally associated with people of another gender. Cross-dressers are usually more comfortable with the sex they were assigned at birth and do not wish to change it. The term “transvestite” does not describe someone who has transitioned to live full-time as the other sex, or who intends to do so in the future. While cross-dressing is a form of gender expression, it is not necessarily tied to sexual orientation or erotic activity. Most cross-dressers are heterosexual.

sex – The classification of people as biologically male or female. At birth, infants are assigned a sex based on a combination of bodily characteristics including chromosomes, hormones, internal reproductive organs, and genitals.

Definitions adapted by P.O.V. from the GLAAD Media Reference Guide 2002/2003, available at the website of the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation: www.glaad.org/media/guide, with additional contributions from Kate Bornstein, except for “homophobia,” adapted from www.religioustolerance.org.

Mini Glossary

The following terms are commonly encountered in U.S. Christian communities today. The definitions are specific to Christian belief and in reference to the topics and denominations featured in *Family Fundamentals*.

Agnostic: A person who believes that, given our present level of knowledge, we cannot know whether or not a God or higher power exists.

Atheist: A person who has no belief about a deity or believes there is no such thing as a God or a higher power.

Born again: A term generally used within conservative Christian groups to refer to the experience by which a person repents of their sins and takes Jesus of Nazareth as their personal Lord and Savior. This often means developing a sense of a personal relationship with Jesus, and taking his life as a guiding example. Often experienced as an epiphany, the term implies a turnaround or spiritual rebirth. Conservative Protestants believe that being born again is the only way to achieve salvation and to go to heaven after death.

Conservative: An umbrella term which usually refers to Fundamentalists, other Evangelicals, Pentecostals, Charismatics, and other independent or splinter denominations. The term contrasts with mainline and liberal Christians (see below).

Evangelical: Normally refers to a major portion of the conservative wing of Protestant Christianity. Crucial to Evangelical belief is the mission to preach the gospel and to convert. Evangelicals tend to take very conservative views on social matters, such as abortion, equal rights for gays and lesbians, and school prayer. Most Evangelicals tend to be less literal in their interpretation of Biblical passages than are Fundamentalists.

Faith group: A general, inclusive term that might be used to refer to a religion, denomination, sect, or cult.

Fundamentalist: This is a term used since the 1920s to refer to the most religiously conservative groups within Christianity. Its roots can be traced to the late 19th Century as a reaction against liberal movements of Biblical criticism and analysis. Fundamentalists believe in a literal interpretation of scripture (see inerrant) and the doctrines of the Christian faith, and they emphasize strict adherence to those doctrines. Many fundamentalists perceive aspects of “modernity” as threats to

traditional religious values, and are intolerant of other sects of Christianity and other religions.

Heaven: In the Hebrew Bible, Heaven referred to the region where God lived. It was above the firmament which was believed to be a solid covering located a few hundred feet above the earth. In Christian belief it is the abode of God, the Father's House, where selected individuals go after death to be with God. Faith groups differ in their belief about who will attain heaven after death.

Hell: Up to the early part of the 20th century, Hell was generally believed to be a place of eternal punishment and torment. Various Christian groups believe that a person can go to hell after death, rather than heaven, because of sins in their beliefs or actions. Recently, some Christian groups have begun to describe hell as a simple isolation from God. Liberal religious groups generally treat biblical passages on hell as symbolic.

Inerrant: When applied to a sacred text like the Bible, inerrancy is the belief that, as originally written, its contents are infallible, totally free of error and authoritative. Many religions, particularly their conservative wings, believe in the inerrancy of their sacred texts.

Liberal Christianity: In contrast to Fundamentalism, liberal Christianity emphasizes a more figurative and “modern” interpretation of the Bible, and largely disregards biblical miracles and the Virgin birth. Liberal Christianity is more tolerant of other sects and belief systems than is fundamentalist Christianity. Liberal Christians take exception with passages from the Bible that they view as problematic in light of today's religious and secular moral systems.

LDS: Acronym for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or Mormon Church (see below).

Mainline or Mainstream: This is a term that is often used to refer to Christian denominations which are more liberal than Evangelicals. It is not a well-defined word with a universally accepted meaning. Some theologians divide Christianity into three groups: Evangelical, mainline and liberal.

Mormonism: A group of denominations including The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The Mormon Church was founded by Joseph Smith in New York State in 1830. Smith reported experiencing an angelic visitation that led him to the

Mini Glossary

location of golden plates containing the Book of Mormon. Mormons take the Bible and the Book of Mormon as the word of God and their sacred texts. The Church of Latter-day Saints has about 11 million members worldwide and is growing rapidly.

Pentecostal: The Pentecostal family of denominations form one branch within conservative Christianity. Pentecostals believe in the Holy Spirit Baptism, a second manifestation of the power of God which follows an individual's conversion to Christianity. A major defining feature of Pentecostalism is their belief in glossolalia – the ability to “speak in tongues” (ecstatic, spontaneous utterances that are often unintelligible) – which they consider to be a gift of the Spirit. Pentecostals value charismatic religious expression and their services are characterized by an unusual freedom and spontaneity. In other regards, Pentecostal beliefs, practices and social policies differ little from other conservative Christians.

Redemption: A general term meaning to set loose or release a person from bondage. In Christian belief, it generally refers to the deliverance of believers from a state of sin which is possible because of Jesus' death and sacrifice.

Religion: Any specific system of belief about deity, often involving rituals, a code of ethics, and a philosophy of life.

Religious liberty: The most common definition relates to the degree of separation between governments and the religious activity of individuals, congregations, and faith groups. It has also been used to refer to the degree with which individuals can hold beliefs that deviate from those taught by their faith group, without incurring oppression or expulsion.

Religious Right: A group of very conservative, politically active organizations within Fundamentalist Christianity with the goal of implementing conservative changes to society and its laws. The American Family Association, the Christian Coalition, Concerned Women for America, Family Research Council, and Focus on the Family form part of the religious right. Their main areas of activity are in the fields of abortion, homosexual rights, same-sex marriage, physician-assisted suicide, and prayer in the public schools.

Roman Catholicism: This is the largest of the four branches of Christianity, the others being the Anglican Communion, Protestant denominations and Eastern Orthodox churches.

During the fourth century A.D., the branch of the early Christianity which was founded by Paul became the official religion of the Roman Empire. The authority of the Bishop of Rome, the Pope, gradually increased, as Christian missionaries spread out through western and northern Europe. Starting in the 15th century, Roman Catholicism spread to the Americas. The church lost its religious monopoly in Western Europe at the time of the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century, but remains today the largest single Christian faith group, by far.

Salvation: The remission of sins and healing of the gulf between an individual and God. Various passages in Christian Scriptures imply that salvation is achieved either by good deeds, by belief in Jesus' resurrection, by belief that Jesus is the Son of God, by baptism, or by avoiding certain sinful behaviors. Christian faith groups define the criteria for salvation in very different ways.

Satan: Also referred to as the Devil, Lucifer. In the New Testament, Satan is described as a supernatural being who embodies profound evil and who seeks to cause destruction and sin. In older parts of the Hebrew Scriptures, Satan is described as a District Attorney in God's court.

Sin: In the Bible, the Hebrew and Greek words which are translated as sin mean “failing to hit the target” or “missing the mark.” Christian religions share a concept of sin as a transgression of a religious or moral law, but they range widely in their understanding of what comprises sin, its penalties and remediations. In Roman Catholicism, “mortal sin” is a classification of serious offenses against God or the church. Unless cleared through confession and absolution, mortal sin would cause an individual to go to Hell after death. Minor offenses in Roman Catholicism are referred to as “venial sins,” and can be expiated by various good works and activities. In Christian religions, sin is sometimes also understood as a condition of estrangement from God resulting from disobedience to the known will of God. Most conservative Christians believe that, since God is pure and just, a person who sins cannot come into God's presence. Thus the need for salvation, and the healing of the gulf between the individual and God.

Definitions adapted by P.O.V. from the glossary on the Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance's website at www.religioustolerance.org.

Using This Guide

This guide is designed to help you use *Family Fundamentals* as the centerpiece of a community event. It contains suggestions for organizing an event as well as ideas for how to help participants think more deeply about the issues in the film. The discussion questions are designed for a very wide range of audiences. Rather than attempt to address them all, choose one or two that best meet the needs and interests of your group.

Planning an Event

In addition to showcasing documentary films as an art form, screenings of P.O.V. films can be used to present information, get people interested in taking action on an issue, provide opportunities for people from different groups or perspectives to exchange views, and/or create space for reflection. Using the questions below as a planning checklist will help ensure a high quality/high impact event.

- ***Have you defined your goals?*** With your partner(s), set realistic goals. Will you host a single event or engage in an ongoing project? Will this be an introduction to the topic or do you hope to reach consensus by the end of the discussion? Being clear about your goals will make it much easier to structure the event, target publicity, and evaluate results.
- ***Does the way you are planning to structure the event fit your goals?*** Do you need an outside facilitator, translator, or sign language interpreter? If your goal is to share information, are there local experts who should be present? How large an audience do you want? (Large groups are appropriate for information exchanges. Small groups allow for more intensive dialogue.)
- ***Is the event being held in a space where all participants will feel equally comfortable?*** Is it wheelchair accessible? Is it in a part of town that's easy to reach by various kinds of transportation? If you are bringing together different constituencies, is it neutral territory? Does the physical configuration allow for the kind of discussion you hope to have?
- ***Will the room set up help you meet your goals?*** Is it comfortable? If you intend to have a discussion, can people see one another? Are there spaces to use for small break out groups? Can everyone easily see the screen and hear the film?
- ***Have you scheduled time to plan for action?*** Planning next steps can help people leave the room feeling energized and optimistic, even when the discussion has been difficult. Action steps are especially important for people who already have a good deal of experience talking about the issue(s) on the table. For those who are new to the issue(s), just engaging in public discussion serves as an action step.

Facilitating a Discussion

Controversial or unusual topics often make for excellent discussions. By their nature, those same topics also give rise to deep emotions and strongly held beliefs. As a facilitator, you can create an atmosphere where people feel safe, encouraged, and respected, making it more likely that they will be willing to share openly and honestly. Here's how:

Preparing yourself:

Identify your own hot button issues. View the film before your event and give yourself time to reflect so you aren't dealing with raw emotions at the same time that you are trying to facilitate a discussion.

Be knowledgeable. You don't need to be an expert in gay issues or Christianity to facilitate a discussion using *Family Fundamentals*, but knowing the basics can help you keep a discussion on track and gently correct misstatements of fact. If you need background information, look over the mini-glossary located on Page 6 as well as the resources on page 17 of this Guide.

Be clear about your role. You may find yourself taking on several roles for an event, e.g., host, organizer, projectionist. If you are also planning to serve as facilitator, be sure that you can focus on that responsibility and avoid distractions during the discussion. Keep in mind that being a facilitator is not the same as being a teacher. A teacher's job is to convey specific information. In contrast, a facilitator remains neutral, helping move along the discussion without imposing their views on the dialogue.

Know your group. Issues can play out very differently for different groups of people. Is your group new to the issue or have they dealt with it before? Factors like geography, age, race, religion, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic class, can all have an impact on comfort levels, speaking styles, and prior knowledge. If you are bringing together different segments of your community, we strongly recommend hiring an experienced facilitator.

Finding a Facilitator

Some university professors, human resource professionals, clergy, and youth leaders may be specially trained in facilitation skills. In addition to these local resources, groups such as National Conference for Community and Justice (www.nccj.org) may have trained facilitators available.

Facilitating a Discussion

Preparing the group:

Consider how well group members know one another. If you are bringing together people who have never met, you may want to devote some time at the beginning of the event for introductions.

Agree to ground rules around language. Involve the group in establishing some basic rules to ensure respect and aid clarity. Typically, such rules include no yelling or use of slurs and asking people to speak in the first person (“I think...”) rather than generalizing for others (“Everyone knows that...”).

Because *Family Fundamentals* brings up such personal topics, you may also want to ask people to agree that what is said remains confidential and/or ask people to be mindful that they may be talking about the son or mother of the person sitting next to them or offering an opinion on what may be a pivotal event in another person’s life.

* One of the challenges of this topic is that different communities do not necessarily agree on what constitutes a slur. For more details, look at the Glossaries on p.6-8 and the discussion questions about language in the “Political Issues” section on p.11.

Ensure that everyone has an opportunity to be heard. Be clear about how people will take turns or indicate that they want to speak. Plan a strategy for preventing one or two people from dominating the discussion. If the group is large, are there plans to break into small groups or partners, or should attendance be limited?

Talk about the difference between dialogue and debate. In a debate, participants try to convince others that they are right. In a dialogue, participants try to understand each other and expand their thinking by sharing viewpoints and listening to each other actively. Remind people that they are engaged in a dialogue.

Encourage active listening. Ask the group to think of the event as being about listening as well as discussing. Participants can be encouraged to listen for things that challenge as well as reinforce their own ideas. You may also consider asking people to practice formal “active listening,” where participants listen without interrupting the speaker, then re-phrase to see if they have heard correctly.

Remind participants that everyone sees through the lens of their own experience. Who we are influences how we interpret what we see. So everyone in the group may have a different view about the content and meaning of the film they have just seen, and all of them may be accurate. It can help people to understand one another’s perspectives if people identify the evidence on which they base their opinion as they share their views.

Take care of yourself and group members. If the intensity level rises, pause to let everyone take a deep breath. You might also consider providing a safe space to “vent,” perhaps with a partner or in a small group of familiar faces. If you anticipate that your topic may upset people, be prepared to refer them to local support agencies and/or have local professionals present.

General Discussion Questions

Immediately after the film, you may want to give people a few quiet moments to reflect on what they have seen. If the mood seems tense, you may want to pose a general question and give people some time to themselves to jot down or think about their answer before opening the discussion. Unless you think participants are so uncomfortable that they can't engage until they have had a break, don't encourage people to leave the room between the film and the discussion. If you save your break for an appropriate moment during the discussion, you won't lose the feeling of the film as you begin your dialogue.

One way to get a discussion going is to pose a general question such as

- **If you called a friend to tell them what this film was about, what would you say?**
- **Two months from now, what do you think you will remember from this film and why?**
- **Did anything in this film surprise you? If so, what? Why was it surprising?**
- **What insights or new knowledge did you gain from this film?**
- **What is the significance of the film's title?**



Discussion Questions

POLITICAL ISSUES

- Bob Dornan claims that his political positions on gays have “nothing to do with bigotry.” How do you think he might reconcile his religious beliefs with his sworn responsibility to uphold the law as an elected official? Is it possible to reconcile religious beliefs that define homosexuality as amoral with laws that uphold the right of LGBT people as U.S. citizens to be free from discrimination? Examine the recent Supreme Court decision on Texas sodomy law as an example.

- In the opening scene, a protester carries a sign that reads: “God said kill all fags.” What other signs have you seen? Should the law distinguish between free speech and hate speech, speech that incites violence, or speech that is intimidating or threatening? If so, where would you draw the line? Is this sign an example of hate speech? Discuss the appropriateness of this term. How would you define “hate speech?”

- Bob Dornan says that “To use the word ‘gay’ instead of ‘sad’ is an idiotic acquiescence to a public relations ploy.” Do people have the right to choose their own labels? Is it possible to be respectful and still refuse to use the label that someone has chosen for themselves or to continue to use terminology that they have defined as offensive?

- There are significant differences in the language that people use in discussing the issues raised in *Family Fundamentals*, reflecting deep divisions in politics and perspective. Consider the implication of the phrases below. Who benefits and who is hurt by the use of each phrase? How does use of “loaded” terminology make it difficult to hear someone with a point of view that differs from your own? Discuss the possible basis and motivation for “loaded” terminology.

sexual preference vs. sexual orientation

disapproving vs. homophobic

homosexual lifestyle vs. being gay

- Are there other examples you have heard? If so, what and how did the term or phrase make you feel?

- Susan Jester recalls realizing that “...interacting with people that influence public policy every day, enact laws, etc. I almost felt a responsibility to come out.” Brian Bennett talks about being “complicit in silence.” Do LGBT people have an obligation to “come out?” Do children of parents who are publicly and vocally involved in anti-gay politics have a special responsibility to either “come out” or to remain closeted? Other than being gay, can you think of situations where people feel obligated to hide or reveal a part of their identity? How do you think those people feel? What might the consequences be of having to hide a part of yourself or reveal something, knowing there is a risk of ridicule or discrimination?

- At one point in the film Brian Bennett describes Bob Dornan as “a friend, mentor, policy maker and a bone fide 100% grade ‘A’ homophobe.” He later states that, “When somebody like me comes out to someone like Bob Dornan, [it] turns upside down every stereotype that he’s created in his own mind.” What difference does knowing individual gay people make in the acceptance or rejection of stereotypes?

- Brian Bennett is both gay and a committed Republican. Why do some people see this as a contradiction? How does Bennett reconcile his identity as a gay man with his political commitment to the Republican party?

- On explaining her marriage and birth of her son, Susan Jester says, “I think I was always gay but tried to be straight” and “I really do feel that it’s a genetic thing.” What are the implications of concluding that being gay is a choice or that people are “born that way”? How are beliefs about the nature of homosexuality tied to specific political positions on gay rights?

- Kathleen Bremner’s group promotes “reparative therapy,” which purports to transform homosexuals into heterosexuals. What beliefs about homosexuality underlie the notion that homosexuality can be “cured”? Why do LGBT groups reject “reparative therapy” as ineffective and inappropriate?

Discussion Questions

- Heather Berberet, a representative from the San Diego Lesbian and Gay Men's Community Center says, "I think the point is there are as many experiences as there are people on this planet. And to have one group of people say that their experience is what everyone should have is problematic. And it's not about what this country is founded upon." Pastor Jim Hill responds that he doesn't find her remarks "necessarily intellectually persuasive." Discuss the two comments and explore the differences in regards to their interpretation of democratic values.
- Bill Jones, Music Director of the Holy Rosary Catholic Church: "People's perspectives need to be challenged because we're stuck...In America in general we're stuck. We've stopped; we haven't grown. And people are putting up too many barriers." Do you agree? Why or why not? Is this an issue of extending American values to cover more people or of abandoning core values?
- Brett Mathews was discharged from the military because he is gay. Do you believe that the Navy's exclusion of Mathews was justified? What did the Navy lose by discharging him? What did it gain?
- Delores Horsman, Chair of the 2002 San Diego Christian Conference on Trauma and Sexuality says, "there was a day and time I thought that it would be really nice if just all those gay people would just all get AIDS and die...They all deserved it. Of course, I knew that wasn't a good attitude, but that was an honest feeling and it was okay at the time...I've gotten over that. I don't feel that way anymore. So that's healing." Why did Delores feel at one time that gay people deserved AIDS? What factors do you think may have changed her attitudes? What would the implications of her original belief be on efforts to curtail the spread of AIDS or cure the disease?
- List gay stereotypes and stereotypes of conservatives or Christian fundamentalists. How do the people you see in the film confirm or contradict the stereotypes on your list?

INTERPERSONAL ISSUES

- Brett Mathews observes that, "It would almost be as hard for them to accept me as it would be for me to be straight." If it was your job to help the parents and children in the film reconcile, what would you do? What would you suggest to the parents? What would you suggest to the children?
- In the film, what ideas do the parents seem to hold about what it means for their children to be gay? From what you see of the children, are the parents' ideas accurate? Explain the specific evidence on which you base your conclusion.
- One of Kathleen Bremner's first reactions to hearing that her daughter was a lesbian was "I blamed myself...What did I do?" Why is this a common reaction? Why do some parents experience their children's honesty in coming out as hurtful? Why does Kathleen's pain turn to anger?
- Kathleen remembers Susan's coming out as abrupt: "and she got up and walked off. And I sat there absolutely stunned." How do you think Susan's actions affected her mothers feelings?
- Both Kathleen Bremner's group, the San Diego Spatula Ministries, and PFLAG, offer comfort to families of gay children. What is the difference in their approaches? What are the motivations for and intended outcomes of each group?
- Do parents have a responsibility to support their children's choices, even when they disagree with those choices? Do parents have a responsibility to object when they perceive that their children have made destructive choices? What if parents and children disagree about the definition of "destructive" or the definition of "choice?"
- Brett and David each receive letters that reiterate how their families feel about their being gay. How do you think the letters make Brett and David feel? In what ways did Brett's and David's reactions match or depart from the intentions of the letters' authors? Do the letters help achieve the parents' aim of getting their children to stop being gay?

Discussion Questions

- David is given an organizational letter written by his grandmother, Kathleen Bremner, in which she labels his being gay as “deviant, unnatural, and destructive to the human race.” She signs the letter, “Sincerely in Jesus, the Compassionate One.” In your view, why do you think Susan questions the compassion of the letter? How might Kathleen be interpreting compassion differently from her daughter? How might one read the letter as an expression of compassion?
- Guy Foti, David’s partner, thinks that Kathleen Bremner is just not listening. Do you think that he is right? What examples of listening or not listening do you see? Should you be expected to listen when what you hear is contradictory to your core beliefs?”
- Why do you think that Brett Mathews’ family asks him not to participate in the documentary? Why do you think he decided to participate anyway?
- In a conversation with David, the filmmaker observes that his family doesn’t hate him. “They love you. They said so.” Why do you think David responds, “I feel like I’m hated?” What is the long-term impact of feeling like you’re hated by society? What is the long-term impact of feeling like you’re hated by your family?

RELIGIOUS ISSUES

- William Koenig, a parent in Spatula, says, regretfully, that “So many churches turn their door in their [homosexual’s] face or say, ‘We don’t want you here.’” Why do you think this situation exists? What do you think the policy should be and why? Why don’t Koenig and the other parents see gay people’s feelings of exclusion from conservative churches as a possible result of their policies?
- According to Kathleen Bremner, “The Bible says that homosexuality is a sin and is wrong, and it is a destructive behavior that will not bring happiness. It says that very clearly. It’s just wrong. So, you know, you can’t argue with that. It’s just the way it is.” On what biblical passages might Bremner base her assertions? What is the response of gay Christians who disagree with her interpretation?
- For background information on this topic, you may want to visit <http://www.ecwr.org/faqbible.htm>, a gay evangelical perspective on biblical passages related to homosexuality, and other websites listed in the resource section of this guide. Compare the information there with what you hear in the film and with what your own religious doctrine teaches. How do you account for the differences between the various sources?
- Why was Brian Bennett so stunned to hear Andrew Sullivan claim that the Catholic church was not always intolerant of gay people?
- What does your religious institution teach about homosexuality? Have the teachings always been the same? If they have changed over time, what do you think led to the change?
- Is it possible to define homosexuality as a sin without being homophobic? In practical terms, is it possible to “hate the sin and love the sinner”? Why or why not? What do the experiences of the children in the film suggest?

Taking Action

Because the issues raised in *Family Fundamentals* are connected to very deeply held beliefs, simply listening respectfully will be, for some people, a significant action step. Make a commitment to private contemplation on issues that interest you. Those who are ready to go farther might consider the following actions:

- Look at the various groups in your community that speak publicly about homosexuality, gay rights, and/or the “culture wars.” Brainstorm ways that these groups might model and advocate for compassion.
- Make a pledge to speak out when you witness public attacks, either physical or verbal, on people in your community.
- Susan Jester links the use of words like “deviant” to describe gays to people feeling like they have permission to “kill a Matthew Shepard.” Consider how certain beliefs about homosexuality are connected to action and the impact of the words we use. Conversely think about how particular beliefs about fundamentalists are also connected to action? Create a guideline for appropriate language and appropriate public action for your community. Make sure the guidelines ensure that people from the entire range of your community feel heard and respected.
- Look at the policies and public statements of your religious institution. How do the policies make gay people feel? If it does not already exist, try crafting a policy that would make gays and lesbians feel welcome. Consider issues such as whether “family memberships” or honors typically given to couples include domestic partners.
- The parents and children in the film seem very far apart, and yet they all strive for justice in their own way. Brainstorm a list of justice-related issues on which they might find common ground. Facilitate disparate groups in your community coming together to work on some of the issues on your list.
- Commit to learning more about the position in the film with which you are least familiar. As part of this, arrange for an in-depth dialogue with someone who holds a point of view that you do not share.
- Investigate instances of discrimination or gay-bashing in your community. Develop strategies that could prevent or minimize the occurrence of such instances in the future.
- Investigate instances of religious intolerance or bashing by people or groups from the LGBT community. Explore the reasons behind such actions or feelings.

Resources

P.O.V.'s Family Fundamentals Website
www.pbs.org/pov/familyfundamentals

Family Fundamentals official website
www.deepfocusproductions.com

What's Your P.O.V.?

P.O.V.'s online Talking Back Tapestry is a colorful, interactive representation of your feelings about Family Fundamentals. Listen to other P.O.V. viewers talk about the film and add your thoughts by calling 1-800-688-4768.
www.pbs.org/pov/talkingback

SUGGESTED WEBSITES:

AFFIRMATIONS

www.affirwww.exodusinternational.org

Affirmations is a group supporting gay and lesbian Mormons, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

www.apa.org/pi/lgbc/policy/statements.html#10

In 1997, the American Psychological Association adopted a position paper regarding reparative or conversion therapy methods for homosexuality. This website address links to the APA's "Resolution on Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation" and other related topics. See also: www.apa.org/pi/lgbc/publications/justthefacts.html.

AMERICANS UNITED

www.au.org

Americans United tracks the activities of both conservative and liberal religious-based movements and their effects on the separation of church and state.

ASSEMBLIES OF GOD CHURCH

<http://ag.org>

Learn more about Kathleen Bremner's Church, the Assemblies of God, and their views regarding homosexuality at http://ag.org/top/beliefs/position_papers/4181_homosexuality.cfm.

BOB DORNAN

www.bobdornan.com

This is former California Congressman Bob Dornan's official site and includes his biography, position statements, and a gallery.

CATHOLIC CHURCH

www.catholic.com

Learn more about Brian Bennett and Bob Dornan's church, the Catholic Church, and their official stand on homosexuality at <http://www.catholic.com/library/homosexuality.asp>.

DIGNITY, USA

www.dignityusa.org

Dignity USA is a group supporting gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender Catholics. Their position on Catholicism and homosexuality can be found at www.dignityusa.org/faq.html.

EVANGELICALS CONCERNED

www.ecwr.org

Evangelicals Concerned is an Evangelical group supporting gay and lesbian Christians. For their particular view on homosexuality, visit www.ecwr.org/faqecwr.htm.

EXODUS INTERNATIONAL

www.exodus-international.org

Exodus International is a worldwide Christian organization that "ministers the transforming power of the Lord Jesus Christ to those affected by homosexuality." Susan Jester discusses her mother's alliance to the group briefly in the film.

FOCUS ON THE FAMILY

www.family.org

Focus on the Family is a Christian-based group with close ties to Kathleen Bremner. They collaborated to present the conference featured in the film that advocated faith and reparative therapy as a cure for homosexuality.

Resources

DAVID JESTER

www.jesterarts.com

Susan Jester describes a love for the arts shared by David and Kathleen. Viewers can catch glimpses of his paintings throughout the film. Visit David's website to see more of his artwork.

THE MATHEW SHEPARD FOUNDATION

www.matthewshepard.org

The Matthew Shepard Foundation hosts this site to document the murder of Shepard and to help raise awareness of issues involving discrimination and diversity. Susan Jester discusses Shepard's murder in her interview.

THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

www.lds.org

www.mormons.org

These are sites for Brett Mathew's church, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, also known as the Mormon Church. Their attitude towards homosexuality can be found at www.mormons.org/question/faq/category/answer/0,9777,1601-1-60-1,00.html.

NATIONAL GAY AND LESBIAN TASK FORCE

www.nglhf.org

The website of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force includes links to a variety of religious and political groups that deal with LGBT issues, including the Log Cabin Republicans (in the "about" section). Their publications also include a downloadable response to groups claiming to "cure" homosexuality (click on the "issues" section).

PEOPLE FOR THE AMERICAN WAY

www.pfaw.org

People for the American Way tracks the activities of conservative groups and their influence on America's social, cultural, and political landscape.

PFLAG

www.pflag.org

Brett Mathews is on the Los Angeles board of directors of Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays. This nationwide group works toward "a society that embraces everyone, including those of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities."

POLITICAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATES

www.publiceye.org

Political Research Associates is an independent, non-profit research center that studies movements, institutions, and trends that obstruct an open, democratic, and pluralistic society.

QUEER THEORY

www.queertheory.com/theories/spirits/queer_religion_christianity.htm

Contains a lengthy, annotated list of organizations serving LGBT Christians.

REPUBLICAN UNITY COALITION

www.republicanunity.com

Brian Bennett is a co-founder and California Vice-Chair of the Republican Unity Coalition, a gay-straight alliance of influential Republican leaders formed to address concerns of gay and lesbian Americans. Among its supporters are President Gerald Ford, who heads their Advisory Board.

SAN DIEGO SPATULA MINISTRIES

www.spatula-ministries-of-san-diego.org

Learn more about Kathleen Bremner's life, beliefs, and her organization, the San Diego Spatula Ministries.

Resources

SOULFORCE

www.soulforce.org

Soulforce is an interfaith group that challenges religious policies and teachings that disapprove of homosexuality. Available to download online is the pamphlet, *What the Bible Says – and Doesn't Say – about Homosexuality*, by former Evangelical leader and now openly gay Soulforce Founder, Rev. Mel White.

SOUTHERN POVERTY LAW CENTER

www.tolerance.org

A web project of the Southern Poverty Law Center, this site provides resources and interactive lesson plans to help create communities that value diversity.

SERVICEMEMBERS LEGAL DEFENSE NETWORK

www.sldn.org

Servicemembers Legal Defense Network covers the U.S. Military's regulations on lesbian, gay, and bisexual military personnel.

ANDREW SULLIVAN

www.andrewsullivan.com

Andrew Sullivan, Senior Editor of the *New Republic*, debated with conservative host Pat Buchanan on *Crossfire* over the Catholic Church's history on homosexuality. Read more about Sullivan's views on gay issues at his official website.

UNITED STATES SUPREME COURT: LAWRENCE ET AL. VS TEXAS

www.supremecourtus.gov

On June 26, 2003, the U.S. Supreme Court issued a sweeping declaration of constitutional liberty for gay men and lesbians by overruling a Texas sodomy law. View the entire ruling at <http://a257.g.akamaitech.net/7/257/2422/26jun20031200/www.supremecourtus.gov/opinions/02pdf/02-102.pdf>.

UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS: TEN COMMANDMENTS MONUMENT

www.ca11.uscourts.gov/opinions/ops/200216708.pdf

Citing constitutional church-state divides, on July 1, 2003 the United States Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit ruled that a 2 1/2-ton Ten Commandments monument must be removed from the rotunda of the Alabama Supreme Court in Montgomery. Read the official ruling on this controversial case regarding the separation of church and state.

To purchase "*Family Fundamentals*"
please go to www.deepfocusproductions.com
or call: 1-800/343-5540.
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American Documentary, Inc.

www.americandocumentary.org

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Photo above: Charles Schneider

Front cover (top): Arthur Dong

Front cover (bottom): Brian Bennett Collection