

# Weekender

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## Lesbianism

Gay women say choice is not  
whether to be homosexual but  
whether to act on those feelings

By MICHELE MECKE

Like most young women, 20-year-old Mary is at an age of self-discovery, of defining her values and lifestyle.

But unlike most of her peers, Mary's growing self-awareness has produced derision and condemnation from strangers, friends and family. All because she loves women instead of men.

Mary is one of an estimated 10 percent of Americans—or 22 million people—who prefer the emotional and physical love of their own sex. Perhaps 5 percent of American women—8 million people—can be classified as lesbians. The number of gay men is greater, approximately 13 percent or 14 million.

The statistics are uncertain because homosexuality is taboo. Although homosexuals have lived in all cultures throughout history, experts say many persons today are so uninformed that they don't realize or define their own feelings. And many who do never express them for fear of scorn, harassment or discrimination.

"Gay is a heavy-duty thing to call yourself," Mary admits.

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