

## Homophobia and Heterosexism

**Homophobia** – The irrational fear or hatred of, aversion to, and discrimination against homosexuals, homosexuality, or behaviours or beliefs that do not conform to rigid sex role stereotypes.

### How Homophobia Hurts Us All

- You do not need to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer to be affected by homophobia. It can greatly impact the lives of heterosexuals.
- Some heterosexual individuals feel they can't form a close, intimate relationship with a person of the same sex for fear of being perceived as lesbian, gay, bisexual or queer.
- It locks people into rigid gender roles
- Compromises human integrity by encouraging people to treat others badly
- It inhibits appreciation of other types of diversity, which makes it unsafe for everyone as we all exhibit unique traits not considered mainstream or dominant.

**Heterosexism** – The system by which heterosexuality is the assumed norm. This is the institutionalized assumption that everyone is, or should be heterosexual. Heterosexism forces lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer people to struggle constantly against their own invisibility and creates challenges for them in creating a positive identity.

**Heterosexual Privilege** – Member of an oppressed group are denied privileges that members of the non-oppressed group often take for granted. These privileges are often so discrete that they can be difficult to identify. Some examples are:

- Kissing, hugging or being affectionate in a public space without feeling threatened

- Expressing pain when a relationship ends, having other people notice, and sympathize
- Living with your partner and doing so openly
- Receiving validation from everyone
- Receiving validation from your religious community and being allowed to be a member of the clergy
- Being employed as a teacher without fear of being fired because you are assumed to be bad influence on children

### **Suggestions on Combating Heterosexism**

- Assume that wherever you are, there are LGBTQ people who are wondering how safe the environment is for them.
- Contribute to creating a safe environment by clearly stating your support for LGBTQ people.
- Do not assume that everyone you meet is heterosexual.
- Do not assume that an LGBTQ individual of the same gender is attracted to you.
- Confront your own fears and bad feelings about LGBTQ people.
- Challenge heterosexism whether or not LGBTQ people are present.
- Realize that LGBTQ oppression is perpetuated in social situations where physical affection is exclusively heterosexual.