

Fact and Information Sheet About:

Heterosexism

Heterosexism is the assumption that all people are heterosexual and that heterosexuality is superior and more desirable than homosexuality or bisexuality. Heterosexism is also the stigmatization, denial and/or denigration of anything non-heterosexual. We live in a predominantly heterosexist society and that attitude is used to justify the mistreatment, discrimination and harassment of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and questioning individuals. Many who are glbtq also internalize this attitude leading to denial of their true selves/identities, low self-esteem, self-hatred and other issues. There would seem to be a direct link between heterosexism and homophobia, the irrational fear or hatred of homosexuals (including bisexuals and transgender individuals).

Some manifestations of heterosexism are:

Over-sexualization:

- It is thought that GLBT people are only looked upon as mere sexual beings rather than complex people with lives apart from their sexuality or gender identity.
- Assuming that every same sex interaction is sexual, or potentially sexual.
- Assuming that GLB people are interested in someone of the same sex regardless of sexual orientation.
- Interpreting everything that GLBT people do in terms of their sexuality.
- Avoiding touching or becoming close to GLBT people in fear they will take it the 'wrong' way.

Denying Significance- Personally:

- The opposite of Over-sexualization by assuming that sexual orientation is not significant.
- Remarking, "It doesn't matter to me that you're gay." Sexual identity is significant and should matter.
- Expecting GLBT people not to talk of their relationships as many heterosexual people do, assuming that sexual orientation should not be talked about.

Denying Significance- Politically:

- Criticizing GLBT people for making an issue of their sexuality. Remarking things such as, "I don't care what they do in bed, but don't tell me about it."
- Not understanding that in our culture, which is alternately oblivious to GLBT people, or dangerous for them, sexuality and gender identity is already a political issue.
- Not understanding that heterosexuality is politically enforced by giving legal rights for marriage, finance and other such things, while legally denying homosexuals the right to marriage, housing, jobs, child custody, etc.

Labeling Homosexuality, Bisexuality or Transgender a Problem:

- Being in the mind that GLBT people want or need special treatment. Or believe they all need special treatment because of their sexual orientation.
- Believing that homosexuality, bisexuality or transgender can and should be cured.

Making Invisible:

- Assuming that everyone is heterosexual until told else wise.
- Always asking women about boy friends and men about girlfriends.
- Telling GLBT people they are over reacting when they get upset about the oppression that they feel.

Expecting to be Taught:

- Putting the burden of responsibility for education and for working for change on the GLBT person. Not helping or working for change concerning GLBT issues.
- Forcing GLBT people to take all of the initiative in coming out.
- Not making openings to come out by acknowledging in conversations the possibility of non- heterosexual relations.
- Becoming upset that GLBT people are not patient about educating you.

Miss- Defining Homosexuality, Bisexuality:

- Confusing bisexuality with non- monogamy; assuming that bisexuality means being involved simultaneously with both men and women.
- Assuming that bisexuality is fickle or promiscuous, that they cannot commit to a stable monogamous relationship.
- Musing that lesbians hate men.
- Assuming that GLB people want to convert to heterosexuality.
- Trying to help someone go "straight."
- Thinking non-heterosexual orientation is a phase.
- Assuming lesbians and gay men's sexual orientation is in reaction to a bad heterosexual experience.
- Thinking that you have more right then a GLBT person to judge the morality or normalcy or any persons sexual orientation, including heterosexuality.

Heterosexual privileges

- As a heterosexual, I am privileged to be able to be free of fear and walk across campus holding my girlfriend's or boyfriend's hand.
- As a heterosexual, I am privileged that I can be a member of ROTC without fear of being "found out" and losing my scholarship as well as my career plans.
- As a heterosexual, I am privileged to join a fraternity or sorority without fear of being rejected based on my sexual identity.
- As a heterosexual, I am privileged to be able to talk freely about my "relationships" with roommates, friends, and family.
- As a heterosexual, I am privileged to play varsity sports without the fear of being removed from the team because of my sexual identity.
- As a heterosexual, I am privileged to walk into any bar or dance with my partner and dance without fear of being verbally or physically abused.

- As a heterosexual, I am privileged to interview for jobs and be able to discuss my plans for marriage without fear of being discriminated against.
- As a heterosexual, I am privileged to run for a student leadership position without students focusing only on my sexual identity.
- As a heterosexual, I am privileged to walk this campus without fear of physical or verbal harm based solely on my sexual identity.
- As a heterosexual, I am privileged that I am a member of the dominant culture and I MAY CHOOSE TO BE AN ALLY for gay, lesbian, and bisexual students.