



Writing for Change

RAISING AWARENESS OF DIFFERENCE, POWER, AND DISCRIMINATION

1.5 Uncovering Attitudes About Sexual Orientation

Objectives

Introduce the concepts of homophobia and compulsory heterosexuality.
Analyze and discuss the effects these forces exert in students' lives.

Materials needed

Copies of the handout

Time needed

Ten to twenty minutes

Instructor directions

Ask your students to study the definitions of the terms “homophobia” and “compulsory heterosexuality” and identify ways in which these forces are at work in their lives.

Have them discuss ways in which they are affected by each.

Definitions

Homophobia: Thoughts, feelings, or actions based on fear, dislike, judgment, or hatred of gay men and lesbians/of those who love and sexually desire those of the same sex. Homophobia has roots in sexism and can include prejudice, discrimination, harassment, and acts of violence.

Compulsory heterosexuality: The assumption that women are “naturally” or innately drawn sexually and emotionally toward men, and men toward women; the view that heterosexuality is the “norm” for all sexual relationships. The institutionalization of heterosexuality in all aspects of society includes the idealization of heterosexual orientation, romance, and marriage. Compulsory heterosexuality leads to the notion of women as inherently “weak,” and the institutionalized inequality of power: power of men to control women’s sexuality, labor, childbirth and childrearing, physical movement, safety, creativity, and access to knowledge. It can also include legal and social discrimination against homosexuals and the invisibility of or intolerance toward lesbian and gay existence.

Variation

Ask your students to consider the definition of the term “racism.” Use this definition, or create your own:

Racism: The systematic mistreatment of people of color based on the belief in the inherent superiority of one race and thereby the right to dominance. Racism is one manifestation of institutionalized differences in economic, social, and political power in which members of some ethnic and cultural groups benefit at the expense of others.



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Directions

Consider the following definitions:

Homophobia: Thoughts, feelings, or actions based on fear, dislike, judgment, or hatred of gay men and lesbians/of those who love and sexually desire those of the same sex. Homophobia has roots in sexism and can include prejudice, discrimination, harassment, and acts of violence.

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Identify ways in which homophobia and compulsory heterosexuality are at work in your daily life:

Find some examples of compulsory heterosexuality in your daily life. Consider the mainstream media, advertising, political campaigning, your religious milieu, your workplace, the law, your discipline or major, your insurance coverage, your clubs or organizations, and the like. What assumptions and values do these venues represent?

Do the same with examples of homophobia.

Ask yourself the following questions:

How are you affected by compulsory heterosexuality?

How are you affected by homophobia?

How would you be affected if your sexual orientation were different than it is now?

How would others you know — friends, family members, classmates, members in your clubs or organizations — be affected?

How will understanding these definitions change your thinking about compulsory heterosexuality and homophobia?

Will it change any of your behaviors? If so, how?

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