What is Homophobia?
Homophobia is the irrational fear and intolerance of a person’s real or perceived sexual orientation. It can be caused by hate, prejudice, fear, and/or ignorance. Anti-gay violence and hatred created by homophobia are the causes for most hate crimes in the U.S. Homophobia has different motivations, but it always leads to hurt and exclusion of others.

What are different examples of Homophobia?
• Using slurs such as “fag”, “gay”, and “dyke” to express dislike or contempt of someone
• Being outspoken about gay rights, but making sure everyone knows you are straight
• Changing seats or walking in a different direction so you won’t be too close to someone who is lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ)
• If you are straight and assume someone who is LGBTQ and of the same gender is attracted to you

Here are some specific manifestations of Homophobia:
Internalized Homophobia: The experience of shame, aversion or self-hatred in reaction to one’s own feelings of attraction for a person of the same sex.
Institutional Homophobia (can also be considered Heterosexism): Attitudes and policies that discriminate against people on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity within governments, organizations, certain religions, businesses, and other institutions. For example, many groups have policies against LGBTQ holding offices, the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy in the military, absence of positive representations of LGBTQ in the media and movies, lack of funding or support for LGBQ events and groups, and proposed federal same-sex marriage bans.

What is Heterosexism?
Assuming every person to be heterosexual therefore marginalizing persons who identify as LGBQ. It is also believing heterosexuality to be the superior sexual orientation.

What is Heterosexual privilege?
Privilege is the overall unearned advantages and rights that systematically empowers certain groups over others. Heterosexual privileges are the benefits gained automatically by being heterosexual that are denied to homosexuals. It can also be the benefits an LGBTQ person gains by claiming heterosexual identity and denying their true identity.

If you are heterosexual (or perceived as) these are a few benefits:
• you can express affection (kissing, hugging, and holding hands) in most social situations and not expect hostile or violent reactions from others
• you can legally marry the person whom you love in any state in the U.S.
• you know that you will not be fired from a job or denied a promotion because of your sexuality
• you can raise, adopt, and teach children without people believing that you will molest them or force them into your sexuality
• you can go wherever you want and know that you will not be harassed, beaten, or killed because of your sexuality.
How can I contribute to a Homophobia/Heterosexism free environment?

- **Be non-judgmental.** Sexual orientation and gender identity is not something to be judgemental of or ashamed about. Be supportive and open to listen to friends no matter what their sexual orientation or gender identity.

- **Remember that it is not possible to assume someone’s sexual orientation based on what you perceive it to be.** Assuming that everyone is heterosexual “unless you know otherwise” or assuming someone who is “acting gay” is homosexual puts people into specific roles that create certain stereotypes about people. It can be hurtful to assume one’s sexual orientation.

- **Engage in inclusive practices.** Create work, study and living environments in which gender and sexual diversity are included, modeled and valued.

- **Be mindful of the language you use with others.** One of the main ways heterosexism thrives is through language. Saying things such as “that shirt is gay” or “that guy throws like a girl” could be offensive to others. Use words that are gender inclusive such as partner instead of wife, boyfriend, etc. Speak up against teasing, harassing, slurs, and comments that you witness against those who do not fit in with gender roles or heterosexual characteristics. Silence condones and encourages such behaviors.

- **Educate yourself.** If there are things you don’t know or understand about LGBTQ issues, do some research, ask questions or contact a group that deals with these issues.

Why should people be informed about Heterosexism and Homophobia?

*Homophobia and Heterosexism contribute to a climate of fear, hate, and discrimination for everyone.* The attitudes that create Heterosexism and Homophobia also contribute to other kinds of discrimination like racism, sexism, ageism, etc. For example, Heterosexism is a weapon of sexism because it validates sexist practices and confines people to gender roles. Informing yourself of these issues can help you to make decisions that are inclusive and nonjudgmental of others.

Resources

**Books & Articles**

- Homophobia: How We All Pay the Price by Warren J. Blumenfeld
- The Invention of Heterosexuality by Jonathan Ned Katz

**Recognizing heterosexism and homophobia:**

Creating an anti-heterosexist, homophobia-free campus
http://www.mcgill.ca/queerequity/heterosexism/

**Sexual Prejudice: Understanding Homophobia and Heterosexism**