

# Some Ways that Heterosexism and Homophobia Hurt Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered People

## For those in the closet

- The necessity to lie and pretend constantly.
- Can't be affectionate with a loved one except when alone.
- Having to pretend the person you're with is not your lover whenever someone else is around.
- Having people try to "fix you up" with members of the opposite sex.
- Unsolicited advice such as "you'll never catch a man/woman if you act/dress like that."
- Assumptions that you and everyone else are heterosexual.
- Being around people who are "flaunting" their heterosexuality while having to hide your sexuality.
- Having a hard time finding/meeting other lesbian, gay or bisexual people.
- Thinking you are the only one.
- Thinking something is wrong with you.
- Never feeling that you fit in; constantly feeling uncomfortable.
- Never feeling safe/close to another person because of this secret.
- Feeling panic about being found out, and feeling like a coward or a dishonest person.

## For those coming out

- Not just the fear expressed above (which is bad enough) but also the reality - the things you were afraid would happen actually do happen.
- Rejection from friends, roommates, hallmates, family and/or teachers.
- Rejection of your friends or your lover.
- Rejection of other things that are important to you -- your work, interests, etc.
- People refusing to accept your sexual orientation, seeing it as a phase, trying to convince you to change -- "see a psychiatrist" or "you'll grow out of it."
- Having to deal with fear and anger toward you from nearly everyone, including those who have been your best supporters on everything else.
- Losing your job, your living space and financial support.
- Getting lower grades than you think you deserve and wondering if this is why.
- Subtle rejection or distance from many people and having to wonder if it's real or not. Feeling crazy and all alone. Not having any reality checks.

## For those who are already out of the closet

- The things you feared would happen don't happen just once, which is hard enough, but they happen regularly.
- Dealing constantly with homophobia and heterosexism.
- Dealing with put-downs, slurs, homophobic jokes, and being talked about or stared at by others.
- Not getting jobs nor into groups and organizations.

- Not getting accepted into graduate school.
- Being made into a special case - a "good" or "different" gay, lesbian or bisexual person.
- Any affection you show toward a same-gender person is seen as a sexual "come on."
- Encountering verbal or physical abuse/violence against you by total strangers just because of who you are.
- Encountering emotional abuse in the form of anti-gay graffiti, jokes and defaced posters.
- Subtle rejection and avoidance by friends and acquaintances who move slightly farther apart or cross the street when you walk by, then deny they are doing this.
- Not having guaranteed civil rights protection to grieve discrimination.
- Outright legalized mistreatment such as having children taken away, being denied access to your lover, and not getting employment benefits that are given to opposite sex partners.
- Mistreatment by police officers, who may blame the victim; law courts; and the prison system.
- Dealing with people's misinformation and AIDS fears.
- Getting psychiatric/psychological abuse when seeking help.
- Lack of role models and services that meet your needs as a gay man, lesbian, or bisexual man or woman. (IE, the library or bookstore may not stock newspapers, books or journals that cover the lesbian, gay and bisexual community.)
- Being in the position of having to educate heterosexuals about their own homophobia.
- Finding that programs and educational activities about heterosexism and homophobia are not a routine part of what's happening -- having to organize them yourself if they are to happen at all.