# PRESENTATION ON HOMOPHOBIA, HETEROSEXISM, AND HOMOSEXUALITY

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Time: Three hours lesson plan can be shortened by deleting one or more of the exercises or the sections on "mattering and marginality" or "levels of attitudes" in the conclusion.

Goal: To provide accurate information and data about sexual orientation in an effort to inform participants about the pervasive nature of homophobia and heterosexism in our society and the harm it does both to heterosexuals and lesbians/gays/bisexuals and to encourage participants to investigate their own homophobia and heterosexism.

Objectives:
1. Participants will receive information, research, and data about sexual orientation.

2. Participants will obtain an understanding and empathetic knowledge of what it's like to be a lesbian, gay, bisexual in a homophobic society.

3. Participants will be able to define homophobia and heterosexism and identify the forces and guises they take in society.

4. Participants will evaluate their own homophobic attitudes and discuss their feelings around it.

5. Participants will be introduced to Schlossberg's Continuum of Community and articulate how it feels to "matter" and be "marginal" in society and make the empathic connection with society's marginalization of gay men, lesbians and bisexuals.

6. Participants will be introduced to the Riddle model of Attitudes of Acceptance and understand the importance of moving to a level of Nurturance.

## INTRODUCTION

A. Welcome the participants

B. Ask the participants to turn to the person next to them and introduce themselves. Tell them to give their name and vocation and then say "and I'm a (lesbian, gay or bisexual)."

Ask the group how it felt to apply that label to self. If there was uncomfortable laughter when the assignment was given, ask them why. Point out that the stigma that they associated with applying the lesbian, gay or bisexual label to them selves is one that all bisexuals, gay men, lesbians live with daily. Indicate that this session will attempt to investigate our individual and societal view of l/g/b's and the difficulty they have living in an often repressive and rejecting society.

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C. In groups of three, ask participants to share their name, work or organization, and one personal thing about self. Ask them, "What do you hope to get from the workshop?" Process and feed out on newsprint.

D. Provide goals for the Workshop: (Refer to overhead or newsprint on which you've written the goals.)

1. Disseminate information, research, and data about sexual orientation.
2. Provide an understanding and empathetic knowledge of what it's like to be lesbian, gay or bisexual in a homophobic society.
3. Explore societal beliefs about homosexuality.
4. Help participants get in touch with their feelings about homosexuality
5. Help participants understand the destructive nature of homophobia.
6. Dispel commonly held myths around bisexual, gay men and lesbians

E. Make these general comments:

1. Applaud sponsoring organization
2. Sexuality receiving much attention of late
3. Homosexuality is much misunderstood
4. Great deal of emotionalism around subject
5. Validate participants feelings on issue
6. Stress diversity of gay men, lesbians and bisexuals

VALUES CLARIFICATION EXERCISES

A. Concentric circle exercise: Instruct participants to find a partner. Have partners face each other and join with other pairs so that the entire group has formed two concentric circles (an inner and an outer circle). Give the following instructions:

"I will give you a phrase or question to discuss with your partner. First, one of you will speak for 30 seconds, and then the other one will get a chance to talk, When I signal, the people in the inner circle will move one person to their right, to find their new partner. I will give you another topic and you'll discuss it as before."

- •What is your first memory of around the topic homosexuality?
- •What did you learn when you were growing up about lesbians, gay men and bisexuals from your parents.
- •How might it feel to grow up in a heterosexual culture knowing that you are gay?
- •One question I have about homosexuality is..
- •Right now I'm feeling....."

Process the exercise and draw conclusions.

B. What Do You Know..... Questionnaire:
Hand out questionnaire "What Do You Know About The Gay/Lesbian Lifestyle?" and instruct participants to answer questions on both sides of paper.

When they have finished, ask all who agree with the following statement to go to one side of the room, all who are neutral to stand in the center, and all who disagree, to go to the other side of the room: "I am able to accept seeing open expression of affection between

gay people." Instruct three groups to sit down and discuss the answers to their questions from "What Do You Know About the Gay/Lesbian Lifestyle?"

Ask each of the groups to summarize their discussions. Point out that most people know little about this subject and that a great deal of ignorance and misunderstanding exists in the general population. Point out that there are many myths which are commonly held about homosexuality which foster this ignorance and misunderstanding and consequent fear and homophobia. Discuss the importance of looking at the research and data concerning this topic in understanding it fully.

## INFORMATION AND MYTHS

A. Definition of Homosexuality. Instruct participants to get into groups of three and to develop a comprehensive definition of homosexuality.

Ask groups to report their definition to the large group. Write down key words on newsprint or overhead. Discuss similarities, contrasts, oversights, disagreements.

Suggest that homosexuality can be defined as an individual's behavior, affectional orientation or lifestyle of identifying with person's of the same sex. Note that it goes beyond the sexual nature of an individual and that sexuality is only a small part of the makeup of gay men and lesbians.

Indicate difference between "preference" and "orientation". Stress difference between acting on inherent emotional feelings and making a choice or preference. Talk about the difference about homosexual behaviors where one has engaged in sexual acts with a same sex person and a gay/lesbian lifestyle where one identifies with a specific culture and way of living. Note that most people with a homosexual orientation prefer identifying terms as lesbian, for women and gay, for men.

To help understand sexual orientation the following definition formula helps:

*A _____ is a person who forms loving and sexual relalionships with _____ or who has continuing affectional, emotional and/or erotic attraction to someone of the _____ sex.*

Therefore a *heterosexual* is a person who forms loving and sexual relationships with *a person of the opposite sex* or who has continuing affectional, emotional and/or erotic attraction to someone of the *opposite* sex.

(Apply same formula to lesbian, gay male, bisexual).

B. Present the following information as a lecturette and discussion.

**MYTH #1: "HOMOSEXUALITY IS UNNATURAL AND ABNORMAL."**
(Refer to myths written on newsprint)

In 1938, Dr. Alfred Kinsey, an Indiana University botany professor, was asked to start a course on marriage but was unable to locate any empirical data/research on human sexuality so he began to collect case studies to establish a scientific data base. Over his

career he and his associates collected over 18,000 case histories. Prior to his study, he had no hypothesis to prove, and his findings surprised both he and his contemporaries (Pomeroy, 1982).

According to Kinsey, and substantiated by later scientific studies, it has been found that approximately 10 percent of the general population is homosexual in orientation

Kinsey and his associates found that human sexuality was not an either/or axis condition with a person being either heterosexual or homosexual. Instead they found that sexuality in humans should be viewed as many "sexualities". They found that the human sexual condition was charted on a seven point continuum with 0 being exclusively heterosexual and 6 being exclusively homosexual. (Refer to chart).

Furthermore, he found that:

> 37% of all men had experienced orgasm in a sexual activity with another male sometime in their lifetime;
>
> 26% of all college educated females had at least one significant homosexual experience; and
>
> 30% of all men had some type of homosexual relationship between the ages of 20-24. (Kinsey et al, 1948, and Kinsey et al, 1953).

Numerous other studies have confirmed Kinsey's earlier study that approximately 10% of the population is gay or lesbian. This means that there are nearly 26 million gay men and lesbians in the United States today. This figure does not reflect the bisexuals which some estimate to be another 10-15% of the population. It may not be the "norm" -- the majority of people are not bisexual,gay or lesbian, but for a certain part of the population it is natural to have affectional feelings for person's of the same sex.

Similarly, it has been found that homosexuality has existed in societies over time in history and in cultures throughout the world. With our Western civilization mind set it is difficult to understand other global cultures and the practices involved in them. In an early anthropological study (Ford & Beach, 1951) of 190 cultures it was found that a majority (64%) of the cultures where homosexuality was documented, homosexual relations were considered to be normal and socially acceptable for certain members of the community.

Additionally, homosexuality is also found in other species in nature. Homosexual behavior is seen with some regularity among other non-human species in the animal kingdom. Male-male and female-female mounting and sexual activity has been recorded in many primate and mammal populations. Homosexual interaction has been observed in every mammalian species that has been carefully studied (Deniston, 1980).

## MYTH #2: "HOMOSEXUALS ARE SICK."

Historically, homosexuality was thought to be an illness or pathologically centered. In 1954 Evelyn Hooker undertook a study concerning the mental/emotional state of homosexual men. Up to that point in time the studies undertaken of gay people had been done by clinicians of patients who were seeking psychological help or studied in prisons, mental hospitals, or institutions.

Dr. Hooker challenged the assumption that homosexuality was a pathological condition. She collected a representative sample of gay men living a normal/stable life who were given a battery of tests. A second sample of heterosexual individuals was collected and matched according to IQ, schooling, age and vocation. A panel of experts could not separate the profiles of the two groups from their individual scores on the psychological and personality tests. Thus it was determined that homosexuality was not a pathological condition (Hooker, 1957).

This landmark study broke ground for further studies which consequently led the American Psychiatric Association in 1973 to declare that homosexuality was not a psychiatric disorder. The following year the American Psychological Association went further to state that, "Homosexuality, per se, implies no impairment in judgment, stability, reliability, or general social or vocation capacities." (APA Manual, 1978).

In 1978, Bell & Weinberg showed that lesbians and gay men were as well adjusted as non-gays. After lengthy face-to-face interviews with the 1500 gay men and lesbians, they concluded: "It would appear that homosexual adults who have come to terms with their homosexuality . . are no more distressed than are heterosexual men and women." Their overall conclusion was that homosexuals -- aside from sexual orientation -- do not differ in any essential way from mainstream Americans (Bell & Weinberg, 1978).

## MYTH #3: "YOU CAN PICK OUT HOMOSEXUALS BECAUSE ALL GAY MEN ARE EFFEMINATE AND ALL LESBIANS ARE BUTCH."

Ask participants to brainstorm words that describe gay men and lesbians. List out on newsprint.

Point out that most of the labels attached to gay men and lesbians come from stereotypes that society has build up to identify and punish homosexuals. Stereotypes exist, but they are basically misleading. A SEICUS study indicates that 85% of all homosexuals fit no stereotype and are unrecognizable in daily living situations (SEICUS, 1965). In Kinsey's original studies researchers were only able to predict, on the basis of their observations whether or not the person being interviewed had a homosexual background in 15% of the cases (Pomeroy, 1982).

More homosexuals work in science and engineering than in social services and that 40% more are employed in finance and insurance then in entertainment and the arts; and ten times as many work in computers as in fashion. (Fortune Magazine, 16 December 1991).

Diversity among gays is as great as among non-gays. Social customs, norms, rules governing homosexual behavior are as varied as the number or persons who are gay, bisexual or lesbian. Homosexuality crosses all socio-economic barriers, race, religion, and nationalities.

## MYTH #4: "MOST HOMOSEXUALS ARE CHILD MOLESTERS OR RECRUIT YOUNG PEOPLE."

Crime studies show that over 90% of child molestation is committed by heterosexual men against young girls. (Ravich and Weiss, 1962). The other ten percent comprise women molesting girls and/or boys and men molesting boys. A large number of the perpetrators of this crime are immediate family members of the victim. The overwhelming majority of homosexuals have no interest in pre-adolescent children.

Homosexual "conversion/seduction" is no more common than is heterosexual seduction. Most gay teachers live with the fear that they will be fired immediately if they are "found out." Most, if not all, gays have no desire to convert young people. Unfortunately, their efforts to provide support for younger gays may be misconstrued and misrepresented. If, as the data suggest, it is true that sexual orientation is established by age 3-6, then contact with homosexuals will have no effect on young people.

In a statement in the New York Times Dr. Mary S. Calderone explained the unlikelihood of recruitment by noting:
"No one can choose to be either homosexual or heterosexual, neither of which state depends upon sexual acts but is specifically a state of being. Furthermore, no one who was programmed by five years of age to be heterosexual can be seduced to become homosexual, any more than the reverse. Think of the efforts that have been made through the ages by heterosexuals to seduce homosexuals. It doesn't work either way." (NEW YORK TIMES, June 15, 1977.)

## MYTH #5: "GAYS GET WHAT THEY DESERVE."

Homophobia can be said to be thosenegative feeling, attitudes, actions or behaviors against lesbians, gay men and bisexuals. It is like wise a fear of one's own same-sex sexual or affectional feelings as well as a fear of being perceived as gay or lesbian. Like racism and sexism, homophobia is an all pervasive part of our society. It affects gays as well as non-gays.

An ACPA Monitor survey in 1978 showed that 70% of Americans believe homosexuality is always wrong. A 1988 UCLA national survey of entering freshmen showed that 53% of students believed that there should be laws outlawing homosexual relationships (Astin & Green, 1988). This statistic was up one percentage point over the previous year. In a 1977 study it was found that 75% of Americans felt that homosexuals should not be allowed to work as judges, teachers, or ministers and 67% felt that they should not be employed as physicians or government officials.

Attitudes have not changed significantly in the decade since the above survey. A 1984 survey showed that tolerance among Americans has not improved as 78% of respondents believed that homosexual relations between two adults were always or almost always wrong (Davis & Smith, 1984).

These statistics reflect the largely held social feeling against homosexuality. This feeling against gay men and lesbians comes out in homophobic actions against gays.

Four national or regional studies (PLGTF, Wisconsin Governor's Council, Maine Civil Liberties Union and NGLTF) have documented violent homophobic reaction against gays, finding that 80%+ of the respondents reported verbal abuse, 40%+ reported threats of violence, 20%+ told of being punched/hit/kicked/beaten and 25%+ reported victimization by police (NGLTF, 1988).

With the AIDS epidemic fanning homophobic fears and increased reporting systems documenting gay violence, awareness of the of violence that was once hidden from the public is becoming clearer. The National Institute of Justice -- the research arm of the Justice Department -- conducted a study on bias crime which concluded that "homosexuals are probably the most frequent victims" of hate violence (Finn & McNeil, 1987).

Suicide and chemical dependence in the gay/lesbian community is said to be double the incidence in the heterosexual population. (GAZE, June, 1987, Gibson, 1986). A 1989 Department of Health and Human Services study found that gay/lesbian teenagers are three times as likely as heterosexual teen-agers to attempt suicide (Rocky Mountain News, 1991). This is a another result of the homophobic attitudes of family, society and church. Gay men and lesbians are often forced to extremes because of the rejecting and condemning messages they receive from family, friends and society.

## MYTH #6: "HOMOSEXUALS HAVE THE SAME RIGHTS UNDER THE LAW THAT EVERYONE ELSE HAS."

Lesbians, gays and bisexuals in America do not have the same protection under the law that other citizens have. Being a homosexual is not illegal, per se, but many states have laws which discriminate against homosexuals. Likewise there are laws the make homosexual acts punishable by imprisonment. There are essentially very few laws to protect homosexuals against discrimination.

There are no legal protections statewide for gays against discrimination except in the states of Wisconsin, Massachusetts, Connecticut and Hawaii. Some major cities have civil rights laws protecting homosexuals such as New York (March 1986), Sacramento (April 1986), Washington D.C. (November 1983), but others do not such as Rochester (NY), Atlanta, Dayton, or New Orleans. But in most other parts of the country lesbians, gay men and bisexuals do not have protections against discrimination like women, people of color and disabled individuals.

In June 1986, the Supreme Court upheld Georgia's sodomy law which makes sexual relations between homosexuals illegal. Presently there are 21 states that have sodomy laws outlawing sodomy between opposite sex partners and same sex partners. Five states have sodomy laws against homosexuals only.

Therefore it is illegal in more than half of the United States for gay men and lesbians to express their intimate sexual feelings in relationships. If found doing so they can be arrested and prosecuted.

## MATTERING AND MARGINALITY

The feelings of exclusion by bisexuals, gays and lesbians because of a homophobic and rejecting society are a daily reality for millions of Americans. Heterosexuals can empathize with this feeling of marginality as they reflect on times they have felt excluded.

One writer (Nancy Schlossberg) has expressed these feelings of acceptance and difference in what is called the **Continuum of Community.** Each of us as members of society and groups will experience this phenomena. The two ends of the continuum are "mattering" and "marginality." On newsprint, draw a line with "mattering" on one end and "marginality" on the other end.

Ask the group to think of a situation, environment or group in which they really mattered. (Give an example from your own life.) Ask them, "What were some of the cues that you received that let you know you were important or worth something in that group?" [list out on newsprint)

Then ask the group to think of a situation in which they didn't matter or were marginal. [Give an example.] Ask them, "What were some of the cues which told you that you were discounted or really didn't fit in as an accepted member of that group?" (list out on newspritnt)

Ask the group what they notice, and make these points. In the situation or group in which we matter we get the feeling that others depend on us, are interested in us, are concerned with our fate, identify with us, care about us, and appreciate our contributions. In the situation or group in which we are marginal we get the feeling that others don't care about us, aren't concerned with what happens to us, don't understand us, aren't interested in us, and don't want to learn about us.

Then, ask the participants to take a sheet of paper and write the name of a person or a group in which they know they matter and the name of a person or a group in which they are marginal. Then ask them to answer the following three questions about both situations:

How do you feel in the situation?
How do you knowif you matter or are marginal? What are the cues?
How do you behave in the situation?

In groups of three, ask participants take a few minutes and discuss responses.

Draw conclusion that each of us has experienced what it is like to be different or a member of a minority group and/or to be made to feel different and excluded from a group. When we are able to empathetically connect with that feeling of marginality we are better able to understand how difficult it is for gay men and lesbians to combat societal and institutional and individual homophobia. It also allows heterosexuals to understand and combat their own homophobic attitudes and behaviors.

## CONCLUSION

Refer participants to Dr. Dorothy Riddle's "Levels of Attitude." Discuss four negative levels of attitude and four positive levels of attitude giving examples of each (i.e. Repulsion-the Moral Majority, Pity-Archie Bunker, etc.). Stress the importance attempting to move ourselves and our associates into the positive levels of attitude through education, knowledge and contact with gay people.

Challenge participants to continue to move toward the "Nurturance" level of acceptance and become an advocate for human rights of all people.

Ask for additional questions or comments.

Ask participants to share what they have learned from the workshop.

Provide personal story or personal affirmation as closure.