

Understanding Homophobia

Definition of Homophobia: an irrational fear of hatred of, aversion to, or discrimination against homosexual people or perceived homosexual behavior. It may be experienced by heterosexual as well as LGBT people.

Homophobia can manifest in various ways:

PERSONAL OR INTERNALIZED HOMOPHOBIA

Self-hatred by a homosexual person about their own sexuality. The person believes that feelings of attraction to the same sex are bad, sinful, immoral or repugnant. For the heterosexual person this may manifest as the fear of being perceived by others as homosexual and results in trying to 'prove' their heterosexuality.

INTERPERSONAL HOMOPHOBIA

Usually results in the expression of hatred or dislike of others who are thought to be gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. This may be expressed explicitly through behavior ranging from name calling to homicide, or implicitly for example through jokes that put down people. Given the social dominance of heterosexuality, some level of internal conflict will occur before an individual moves towards acceptance.

INSTITUTIONAL HOMOPHOBIA

Fear of homosexuality in our society is evident as discrimination. Governments cooperate structures, churches and other institutions and organizations discriminate against young people in a variety of ways. Explicit examples of this are policies and legislation that prevents homosexuals from marrying or not being regarded as the next of kin for a dying partner, or superannuation of not going to the surviving same sex partner. Official data collection that ignores sexual orientation as a category is a more subtle form of institutional homophobia.

CULTURAL HOMOPHOBIA

Societal norms that imply that heterosexuality is 'better' and that everyone is or should be heterosexual. The media perpetuates heterosexuality as the norm by not presenting or representing the homosexual view, for example through television, where most characters are assumed to be heterosexual.

