

# Homophobia and Transphobia

## Illumination Project Curriculum

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### INTRODUCTION

Homophobia and transphobia are complicated topics that touch on core identity issues. Most people tend to conflate *sexual orientation* with *gender identity*, thus confusing two social distinctions. Understanding the differences between these concepts provides an opportunity to build personal knowledge, enhance skills in allyship, and effect positive social change.

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### GROUND RULES (10-15 minutes)

**Materials:** chart paper, markers, tape.

Due to the nature of the topic area, it is essential to develop ground rules for each student to follow. Ask students to offer some rules for participation in the post-performance workshop (i.e., what would help them participate to their fullest). Attempt to obtain a group consensus before adopting them as the official “social contract” of the group. Useful guidelines include the following (Bonner Curriculum, 2009; Hardiman, Jackson, & Griffin, 2007):

- Respect each viewpoint, opinion, and experience.
- Use “I” statements – avoid speaking in generalities.
- The conversations in the class are confidential (do not share information outside of class).
- Set own boundaries for sharing.
- Share air time.
- Listen respectfully.
- No blaming or scapegoating.
- Focus on own learning.

Reference to PCC Student Rights and Responsibilities:

<http://www.pcc.edu/about/policy/student-rights/student-rights.pdf>

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### DEFINING THE CONCEPTS (see Appendix A for specific exercise)

An active “toolkit” of terminology helps support the ongoing dialogue, questioning, and understanding about issues of homophobia and transphobia. Clear definitions also provide a context and platform for discussion.

**Homophobia:** a psychological term originally developed by Weinberg (1973) to define an irrational hatred, anxiety, and or fear of homosexuality. More recently, homophobia is a term used to describe the fear, discomfort, intolerance, or hatred of homosexuality or same-sex attraction in others and in oneself (internalized homophobia) (GLSEN, 2002). Examples of homophobia include hate crimes, derogatory comments, jokes that slander, denial of services, and other oppressive actions or beliefs (Bonner Curriculum, 2009). According to Kantor (2009, p. 11), homophobia is categorized into six specific models:

1. **Medical Homophobia:** the notion that gay, lesbian, and bisexual people are ill and unfit to engage in specific familial and or social opportunities (e.g., raise children, teach, etc.).
2. **Religious Homophobia:** the idea that gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals are sinful based on any particular faith-base, and may be cured as a result of prayer or other forms of intervention (e.g., reparative therapies).
3. **Criminal Homophobia:** the fear that gay, lesbian, and bisexual people are committing deplorable illegal acts, including pedophilia.
4. **Political Homophobia:** the perspective that lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals are good “common cause enemies” for those who want to advance on the social and political ladder (e.g., attracting the conservative vote).
5. **Sociocultural Homophobia:** the idea that lesbian, gay, and bisexual people live underground and corrupt lives, and “wish” social discord and chaos on the general population. Sociocultural homophobia also upholds the perspective that same-sex couples flaunt their affection, wish to dismantle traditional family values, and push their lifestyle on others (e.g., gay pride parades, holding hands in public, same-sex marriage).
6. **Biological Homophobia:** the belief that lesbian, gay, and bisexual people are genetically defective. This perspective also upholds that if there is a genetic “link” to homosexuality, then there must be a cure.

**Heterosexism:** a system of power, privilege, and advantage that deems heterosexuality as the superior or “normal” sexuality (GLSEN, 2002; Griffin, D’Errico, Harro, & Schiff, 2007). Similar to racism or sexism, heterosexism describes a system that tokenizes, marginalizes individuals based on sexual orientation (Bonner Curriculum, 2009). Heterosexism is perpetuated in all areas of society, including civic organizations, media outlets, financial institutions, educational environments, human services, and faith-based institutions.

**Lesbian:** a term of identity given to females who are sexually and emotionally attracted to some females (GLSEN, 2002).

**Bisexual:** a term of identity given to individuals who are sexually and emotionally attracted to some males and females (GLSEN, 2002).

**Gay:** a term of identity typically given to males who are sexually and emotionally attracted to some other males (GLSEN, 2002).

**Straight/Heterosexual:** a term of identity typically given to both males and females who are sexually and emotionally attracted to people of the opposite sex.

**Sexual Identity:** a term to describe how we identify our sexual orientation, including gay, lesbian, and bisexual (GLSEN, 2002).

**Transphobia:** a fear, disgust, stereotyping, or hatred of transgender, transsexual and other gender non-traditional individuals because of their perceived gender identity, expression, or status (GLSEN, 2002; Whittle, 2006, March). According to Whittle (2006, March), transphobia can be direct or indirect:

1. **Indirect Transphobia:** any intentional or unintentional action based in ignorance or inadvertence of the trans person's identity, such as referring a transgender woman to a "men's clinic," or failing to recognize a trans man's need to seek gynecological services. Indirect transphobia plays out in failing to recognize trans people in non-discrimination policies, and anti-bullying campaigns. Indirect transphobia also includes the deliberate exclusion of insurance policy coverage for hormone therapies or other gender-affirming medical procedures.
2. **Direct Transphobia:** any activity that sets out to deliberately harm an individual based on their perceived gender identity, expression, or status. Direct transphobia may include discriminatory practices, insulting comments, physical and emotional harassment, threats, and violence. Direct transphobia upholds the belief that the gender non-traditional person is less-than human which may result in overt discrimination in medical care (i.e., failing to treat the trans patient), physical and sexual abuse, and blatant disregard for the trans person's humanity.

**Gender Identity:** an individual's innermost sense of self as "male," "female," "man," "woman," or somewhere in-between, and is often enacted in the use of chosen pronouns (i.e., he, she, him, her, ze, hir) (GLSEN, 2002).

**Gender Role:** a set of behaviors and attributes assigned to men and women based on traditional binary societal expectations of males (maleness) and masculinity, and females (femaleness) and femininity (GLSEN, 2002). Individuals who challenge traditional gender roles by stepping outside of the binary are often referred to as transgender.

**Transgender:** an umbrella term for individuals whose gender expression (at least sometimes) runs against societal expectations of gender, including transsexuals, cross-dressers, drag-kings, drag-queens, gender queer individuals, and those who do not identify with either of the two sexes currently defined (GLSEN, 2002).

**Transsexual:** individuals who do not identify with their assigned birth sex, and sometimes use surgical and hormonal interventions to "transition" and achieve some form of sex-congruence (GLSEN, 2002).

**Gender Expression:** the various ways individuals chose to externally communicate gender through dress, clothing, hairstyle, voice. People tend to match their gender expression with their gender identity. However, gender expression is not necessarily an indication of someone's sexual orientation or gender identity (GLSEN, 2002).

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## ACTIVITY

### Drawing Connections: Exercise (50 Minutes)

(adapted from Catalano, McCarthy, Shlasko, 2007, p. 241)

**Materials:** chart paper, markers, tape.

In groups of 5 or 6, ask students to discuss the connections they see among gay, lesbian, bisexual, and or transgender oppression, and other forms of discrimination and oppression. You may also assign groups to specific “Key Question” areas. Have the students reflect on the IP performances, urge them to cite specific examples from the plays to use during this discussion, and provide them with the definitions above, from the exercise in Appendix A, and other resources that may support interconnections of the materials and concepts (see Appendix B). Or, provide specific scenarios from the IP performance. Have students “chart” their group process in a way that makes-meaning for your specific discipline.

#### Key Questions – Homophobia:

1. How do multiple identities (i.e., race, class, ethnicity, gender) impact homophobia?
2. What are the ways in which homophobia impacts other social identities?
3. What are some *connections* among other forms of oppression?
4. What are some *distinctions* among different forms of oppression (e.g., race, class, gender, etc.)?

#### Key Questions – Transphobia:

1. How do multiple identities (i.e., race, class, ethnicity, religion) impact transgender oppression?
2. What are the ways in which transgender oppression impacts other social identities?
3. What are some *connections* among different forms of oppression?
4. What are some *distinctions* among different forms of oppression (i.e., race, class, religion, etc.)?

#### Key Questions – Homophobia and Transphobia

1. What are some *connections* between homophobia and transphobia (how are they similar)?
2. What are some *distinctions* between transphobia and homophobia (how are they different)?

Bring the group back together to share what they have discussed. What feelings came up for them? What is one concept or idea that sticks with them as a result of the IP performances and class activities?

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## PERFORMANCE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS/PROVOCATIONS

1. What were the different issues that the play's characters faced around homophobia? Transphobia?
2. What were some of the negative attitudes toward gay, lesbian, bisexual and or transgender people in the performance?
3. What were some of the positive attitudes toward lesbian, gay, bisexual, and or transgender people?
4. What issues of institutional oppression were highlighted in the performance?
5. What was the effect of discrimination and oppression on the characters in the performance?
6. Which character's point of view do you most identify with? Why?
7. What issues in the play are also represented frequently in the media's coverage of transgender, bisexual, gay, and lesbian populations?
8. What new information did you learn from the performance? What?
9. What steps will you take to help end oppression against bisexual, transgender, lesbian, and gay people? To become an effective ally?  
(see GLAAD: <http://www.glaad.org/Page.aspx?pid=472> and Oberlin College: [www.oberlin.edu/mrc/Workshops.../trans.../Trans%20Allyship.pdf](http://www.oberlin.edu/mrc/Workshops.../trans.../Trans%20Allyship.pdf) for resources on being an ally).

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## APPENDIX A

### ACTIVITY

#### **Defining the Concepts: Exercise (15 - 30 minutes)**

**Materials:** GLSEN Talking the Talk cards, cardstock/notecards, glue, scissors

Using the Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network's (GLSEN) *Talking the Talk* exercise (2002) cut and paste the cards onto cardstock for easier use. Shuffle the cards and distribute. Each student with a specific term is required to find his or her matching definition. Note: students are required to conduct their search all at the same time, which may feel a little chaotic at first. This is actually a good "warm-up" activity to energize the room.

Once students locate their match, have them stand together one-by-one forming a large circle. Once all terms and definitions have a corresponding match (this may take some time), the entire group should be in a large circle (facing one another), each term standing next to their respective definition.

Next, have each "pairing" read both their term and definition aloud to the group two times. For students new to some of the terminology, the repetition of the term and definition reinforces the concepts, and "vocalizes" the tangibility of concepts. For example:

Student #1: "Coming Out"

Student #2: "To disclose one's identity as a LGBT person to others."

Student #1: "Coming Out"

Student #2: "To disclose one's identity as a LGBT person to others."

This kind of "call and response" should occur for each definition until all definitions have been addressed. Have students check the congruency of the term with the definition provided. If needed, have students switch places in the circle for a more congruent word/definition combination.

Discussion: What was easy about this exercise? What was difficult? What was new? How are these terms used to empower and or oppress others? Are there terms or concepts that are still unclear? Are there terms or definitions missing?

**Talking the Talk PDF (permission granted to use for educational purposes only):**

[http://www.glsen.org/binary-data/GLSEN\\_ATTACHMENTS/file/240-1.pdf](http://www.glsen.org/binary-data/GLSEN_ATTACHMENTS/file/240-1.pdf)

## APPENDIX B

### WEB RESOURCES

Parents, Friends, and Families of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG):  
<http://community.pflag.org/Page.aspx?pid=194&srcid=-2>

Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD):  
<http://www.glaad.org/Page.aspx?pid=183>

Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network (GLSEN):  
<http://www.glsen.org/cgi-bin/iowa/all/home/index.html>

Human Rights Campaign (HRC): <http://www.hrc.org/>

National Center for Lesbian Rights: <http://www.nclrights.org/site/PageServer>

National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE) : <http://transequality.org/>

National Gay and Lesbian Task Force: <http://www.thetaskforce.org/>

Transgender Law Center (TLC): <http://www.transgenderlawcenter.org/>

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