



Education Department Resource

How Does Homophobia Hurt Us All?

For each scenario below, consider how homophobia hurts not just lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people, but *all* people. After reading each scenario, write at least one statement explaining how “homophobia hurts us all.”

- Scenario #1: During his junior year of high school, Marcus became increasingly involved in the drama club and appeared in several school and community productions throughout the year. After seeing him on stage in his first leading role, Marcus’ father proclaimed that when he was seventeen, he was out playing football and dating girls. In his senior year, Marcus’ drama teacher encouraged him to apply to a local college reputed to have an excellent drama program, noting that Marcus had real talent and a bright future ahead of him. At the dinner table that night, Marcus’ father made it clear that he would not contribute his “hard earned money” so that Marcus could “prance around on stage” for four years. Unless Marcus chose a more serious career path, his father indicated, he would be financially on his own after high school.

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- Scenario #2: As the new semester began, Maria and her friends grew more excited about the upcoming senior prom and talked constantly about the boys they hoped would invite them. At lunch one day, Maria admitted she had a crush on Marc and fantasized about the two of them going to the prom together. “Are you crazy?,” commented one of her friends, “He’s never gonna ask you. You’re too...” “Brainy,” another girl chimed in. “It’s all those classes you take—AP Chemistry and AP Calculus and all the others—it’s like you want to be a man or something.” “Yeah,” agreed the first girl. “Marc even told me that he thinks you’re a dyke.” The next day Maria transferred out of advanced placement calculus, a class that she and Marc were in together. When Maria’s advisor inquired about the switch, Maria explained that the higher level math was getting too confusing and thought she’d be more comfortable in a regular class.

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- Scenario #3: Throughout high school, Hector was the victim of verbal and physical assault because of his choice to wear nail polish and make-up to school. It was common for teachers to look the other way as yells of “queer,” “freak,” and “faggot” were hurled at Hector throughout the school corridors. In the bathroom one day, a group of boys cornered Hector and pushed him to the ground. Alex, one of the boys, watched as his peers repeatedly kicked Hector and screamed obscenities at him. Noticing that Alex wasn’t joining in, one of the boys moved over to make room and motioned

for Alex to participate in the beating. When Alex hesitated, the boy commented, “What’s the matter? You feel sorry for the faggot?” Alex reluctantly walked over and began kicking Hector.

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- Scenario #4: Jill is a 16-year-old junior who plays the flute in her high school band. Though things with her boyfriend, Troy, had been great for the first few months, a growing conflict began to concern Jill. Troy accused her one night of caring more about her flute than she did about him, and exerted pressure on Jill to have sex. Jill assured Troy that she cared for him, but said she needed more time. Later that week, Jill’s friend, Althea, confided that Troy told her boyfriend how “frigid” Jill was and that he wasn’t even sure if she liked boys. Althea advised Jill to do something before she lost Troy for good. That night Jill went to the drugstore and bought a pack of condoms.

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- Scenario #5: Rob and Jose had been best friends as far back as either one could remember. Rob, an only child, had always considered Jose to be like a brother. Throughout middle school, however, things began to change. While Rob took an interest in team sports, Jose gravitated more toward the drama and dance clubs. Rob became increasingly uncomfortable with what he viewed as a growing “flamboyance” on Jose’s part. In high school, some of the students began referring to Jose as “the Spanish flame” or the “gay blade.” Rob felt embarrassed being seen with Jose, and awkward being alone with him—especially when Jose touched him or sat too close. The two boys socialized less and less, until their relationship dwindled to an occasional wave or nod in the school corridors.

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- Scenario #6: Kim had always been somewhat of a loner. Shy and plain looking, Kim was often ignored by her classmates, and tended to retreat into the solitary world of books. As a teenager, Kim grew increasingly self-conscious about the way in which her peers viewed her. She was aware that other kids referred to her as a “dog” and a “lesbo.” Kim even once overheard a boy say that all she needed was “a good man for just one night.” Kim became more and more confused as to her own self-identity, and fantasized about a world in which she was popular and sure of herself. When one of the more popular boys in school asked Kim out, she readily agreed. Kim knew that it was probably a joke or bet of some kind, or a test to see if she really was a “lezzie.” Despite this, Kim saw it as an opportunity to make a connection and fit in. Though they only went out a few times, Kim soon found herself pregnant. Because of strict religious beliefs, both families insisted that Kim have the baby.

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At the same time the victims (or *targets*) of prejudice are oppressed, the perpetrators (or *agents*) and other members of the dominant group are hurt in some way as well. Although the effects of oppression differ for specific target and agent groups, in the end everyone loses.

1. Homophobia locks all people into rigid gender roles that inhibit creativity and self-expression.
2. Homophobia compromises the integrity of heterosexual people by pressuring them to treat others badly, actions that go against our basic humanity.
3. Homophobia limits our ability to form close, intimate relationships with members of one's own sex.
4. Homophobia generally limits communications with a significant portion of the population and, more specifically, limits family relationships.
5. Homophobia prevents some lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people from developing an honest self-identity, and adds to the pressure to marry and/or have children, which places undue stress on themselves and their families.
6. Homophobia is one cause of premature sexual activity, which increases the chances of pregnancy and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Young people, of all sexual identities, are often pressured to become heterosexually active to prove that they are "normal."
7. Homophobia results in the elimination of any discussion of the lives and sexuality of LGBT people in the curriculum, keeping important information from all students.
8. Homophobia can be used to stigmatize, silence, and, on occasion, target people who are perceived or defined by others as lesbian or gay, but who are, in actuality, heterosexual.
9. Homophobia prevents heterosexuals from accepting the benefits and gifts offered by LGBT people: theoretical insights, social and spiritual visions, contributions in the arts and culture, to religion, to family life, indeed, to all parts of society.
10. Homophobia (along with racism, sexism, classism, etc.) inhibits a unified and effective governmental and societal response to AIDS.
11. Homophobia takes energy away from more positive activities.
12. Homophobia inhibits appreciation of other types of diversity, making it unsafe for everyone because each person has unique traits not considered mainstream or dominant. Therefore, we are all hurt when any one of us is disrespected.

Adapted from Warren J. Blumenfeld, ed. Homophobia: How We All Pay the Price