

Safe Zone Training

Line Up Warm Up

This exercise offers a similar experience to the “Sit Down If” exercise, but allows participants to go through all of the questions.

This exercise will use statements to examine areas in society that the dominant heterosexual culture can take advantage of without realizing their privilege. (Note that if there is a participant in the audience who is unable to effectively move, ask the participants to raise their voice louder successively for each statement that applies to them). The facilitator will read each item, one at a time in order and participants should take one step forward (about 2 feet) if any statement is true to them. If at any time, the statements become uncomfortable or too personal to them, they have permission to simply stay where they are or walk to the side and observe.

When you have finished reading the list or everyone is moved to the extent of the exercise, introduce the idea of “unearned privilege” and write it on the board. Ask people what they think that this concept means. You can define it as “those rights and privileges one enjoys because s/he is born into a certain group, not because s/he has earned or achieved them.” The aspects that you read as a facilitator are many examples of unearned privilege that heterosexuals (dominant group) enjoy in society and may take for granted. Indeed, many people may be so used to these rights that they don’t consider them privileges or stop to think that others cannot take advantage of the same freedoms.

Privilege is certainly not limited to sexual orientation in society. Ask participants for examples of privilege that men have (gender privilege) or examples of privilege that white people have (white privilege). The idea-is-that demanding equal access doesn’t reflect any “special agenda” or “special rights” but merely equality that every GLBTQ person should have in society.

Ensuring equal access, and providing a Safe Zone on campus can lead to a more proactive and positive environment at WOU where students can focus on education and growth versus hiding or protecting themselves from harassment or harm.

Facilitation Questions

- What did you notice about these questions and who was standing?
- In addition to what was read aloud, what are other “unearned privileges” that heterosexuals enjoy in our society?
- How does the denial of certain rights or privileges affect our students and the inclusive nature of WOU or our society?
- How do laws in Oregon influence this area? Note that the Oregon laws reflect offering the same civil union protections as marriage for state laws, but federal laws prohibit equality. In addition, a number of states refuse to recognize legal rights given Oregon same-sex couples as part of civil union status.
- What can be done to make sure that all faculty/staff/students enjoy equality and access to support at WOU and the community?

Facilitator Observations

- Legal marriage offers 1,138 distinct rights under federal law that are not granted to same-sex couples, even with Oregon’s new laws in place. These fall under health care, family decisions, adoption, legal, financial and cultural areas.

- A recent study published in the Journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics, entitled The Effects of Marriage, Civil Union, and Domestic Partnership Laws on the Health and Well-being of Children found that: (Be very careful about naming this list – going through it could have little impact, and could also spark tangent conversations or other areas of discussion.)
 - * Same-gender couples live in 99.3% of all US counties.
 - * Same-gender couples are raising children in at least 96% of all US counties.
 - * Nearly one quarter of all same-gender couples are raising children.
 - * Nationwide, 34.3% of lesbian couples are raising children, and 22.3% of gay male couples are raising children (compared with 45.6% of married heterosexual and 43.1% of unmarried heterosexual couples raising children).
 - * Vermont has the largest aggregation of same gender-couples (~1% of all households) followed by California, Washington, Massachusetts, and **Oregon**.
- **Studies show that people who are married tend to live longer and lead healthier lives.**
- For adults, a stable, happy marriage is the best protector against illness and premature death. Decades of research have clearly established these links. (Burman & Margolin, 1992; Dawson, 1991; Verbrugge, 1979).
- Studies on marriages have found that married people live longer, have higher incomes and wealth, engage less in risky behaviors, eat more healthily, and have fewer psychological problems than unmarried people. (Waite, Linda J. "Why Marriage Matters." Strengthening Marriage Roundtable. Washington, DC, June 1997)
- Research shows that unmarried couples have lower levels of happiness and well-being than married couples. (Popenoe, David and Dafoe Whitehead, Barbara, USA Today, July, 2000)
- **A recent study shows that denying same-sex couples the right to marry has a negative impact on their mental health.**

Line Up Warm Up Questions

Ask all participants to take one step forward (about 2 feet) or say the word “Privilege” (if speaking) for each item. Read each sentence below one at a time and instructing participants to take one step forward if that statement is true for them. There are no right or wrong answers; they are merely statements that may or may not apply to the people in the room. Stop reading once the list has been completed.

Also explain that the questions are phrased in terms of relationships, assuming that people are in one. If you are not currently in a relationship or have a partner, put yourself in a position as if you did have one.

Take one step forward if...

- You see relationships that look like yours frequently on TV or the movies.
- You are able to hold hands with your spouse/partner in public.
- In Oregon, you and a partner have or would have hospital visitation rights for each other.
- You and your spouse/partner have or would have rights to leave under the federal Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA).
- You are certain your children couldn't be taken away from you because of your family status or relationship.
- You can have a clergy/priest/rabbi administer ceremonies for your relationship.
- Your employer offers sick leave, access to health insurance for your spouse/partner.
- You can give your spouse/partner unlimited gifts without being taxed.
- You feel that you can check into a hotel room or patronize restaurants without fear of mistreatment or harassment based upon your gender identity or sexual orientation.
- You can raise your children without fear of discrimination based upon your family structure.
- You can wear a wedding ring to work and in other public places.
- You can buy greeting cards that reflect important dates and events for your spouse/partner.
- You can display photos of your spouse/partner at your place of work.
- You can talk to colleagues or friends about details in your relationship your partner or spouse.
- You have received a wedding gift from co-workers or neighbors.
- You can read any cultural or other reading material in public places or at work.
- You can bring a partner/spouse to parties or events and introduce them as such.
- Your wedding or commitment with your spouse/partner can be commemorated in the local newspaper.
- You can share a room with your partner/spouse while visiting family members out of town.
- Your partner/spouse is called “aunt” or “uncle” by nephews or nieces in your family.