

WHAT IS HETEROSEXUAL PRIVILEGE?

Introduce this as a family reunion. Explain that each person should read the scenario and answer the questions that follow in the space provided. After about 4-5 minutes, ask people the facilitation questions regarding the scenario.

FACILITATION QUESTIONS

- Is this scenario realistic?
- What are your reactions to the scenario?
- What would you do in this situation? How do you think your family would react?
- If you were to confront your family would you be afraid of your relationship changing? What would your fears be?
- How would this affect you and your partner's relationship?

FACILITATOR OBSERVATIONS

- These scenario are pretty realistic and there are few options for LGBTQ people – confront, let it go, compromise.
- There is a concept called “internalized heterosexism” that many LGBTQ people possess. There are so many messages given that LGBTQ people may not show affection or a variety of other behaviors that heterosexuals do in order to “not make straight people feel uncomfortable.” This can happen even among friends and family.
- LGBTQ people are often put in the position of having to choose between being accepted or rejected by their family and friends. Being a part of their family or being shunned. Being out and open about their identity or concealing it.
- LGBTQ youth who are rejected by their family are 8 times more likely to commit suicide, be homeless, use illicit drugs and fight depression

A handout can then be given that discusses areas of heterosexual privilege in society. Heterosexual privilege is the idea that heterosexuals have unearned societal advantages that LGBTQ people do not possess, simply because of sexual orientation. Remind participants that part of being an ally is being aware of these advantages and their commitment as an ally is to minimize these differences.

FACILITATOR OBSERVATIONS

- Are there other examples of heterosexism in society that you have noticed?
- Where any of these examples surprising?
- How might it feel to live in a world where you are denied access to these things?

SCENARIO

Imagine that you are a lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans person. You and your partner have been in a committed relationship for the last five years. You are “out” to your family, who is uncomfortable about your “lifestyle.” You and your partner visit your parents for the holidays. This is the first time that they asked you to bring your partner. They insisted that you stay with them for the entire two weeks you are visiting and you agree. Imagine what feelings, thoughts and sensations you and your partner might experience in the following situations. Document your comments or thoughts in the space provided.

1. When you arrive, your mother shows you to the room where you will be staying. This room has two single beds separated by two nightstands. Your sister and her new husband are staying in the adjacent room with a king-size bed.

2. Your sister, who is the closest to you and most accepting of your “lifestyle,” introduces your partner to her new husband as your “current” girl/boyfriend.

3. When your nieces, nephews and other family members arrive for the holiday, your sister’s new husband is introduced as “uncle” and your partner is introduced as “a friend.”

4. After the holiday dinner, the adults sit around and talk about memorable moments in their intimate relationships – your parents reminisce about their first date, your sister and new husband recall how she asked him out, your cousin and his wife remember their first kiss, your aunt and uncle recall how he proposed to her. Everybody is taking turns to recall and relive those memories. Although everybody knows about you and your partner, nobody asks you to do the same.

Yep, G. A. (2003). From homophobia to heterosexism to heteronormativity: Toward the development of a model of queer interventions in the university classroom. *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 7, n. 1

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One of the most painful parts of the process of being a LGBTQ Safe Zone Ally is the realization of the unearned privileges and power that one receives, accepts and experiences as a heterosexual person.

Some of the powers and privileges that heterosexuals generally have:

- Not having to justify to others that your heterosexuality is not a choice.
- Legalized marriage
- Right to “family memberships” at recreational facilities
- Purchase of property as an acknowledged heterosexual couple
- Filing joint tax returns
- Ability to adopt children without questions.
- Health insurance for one’s partner
- Decisions on health-related issues as they relate to one’s partner
- Assumption that one is psychologically healthy
- Being able to be open about sexuality and not fear lack of promotions, employment loss, etc.
- Living life without fear of someone finding out about who you fall in love with.
- Ability to express affection in public without fear of your partner and your well-being.
- Talking openly about one’s relationship.
- Being open about one’s living arrangements.
- Being validated by one’s religion.
- Being socially accepted by neighbors, friends, family, co-workers, and professional colleagues.
- Having positive images and role models portrayed in the media.
- Being assured when looking at magazines, advertising, movies and television that you will see relationships that look like yours.
- Sharing holidays with families and one’s partner.
- Activities on campus and in the community that are tailored to your relationship (dances, speed dating, residence halls.)

Note that the state of Oregon has passed a domestic partner bill that grants similar rights to marriage at the state level (but excludes hundreds of rights of marriage at the federal level). Oregon also has guidelines prohibiting discrimination based upon sexual orientation and gender identity in employment, housing, and public accommodations. This would render a few of the rights above to be equal to heterosexuals in Oregon (3, 4, 7, 8 and partially #5 [for state tax purposes].)