

## 9. Bisexual, Lesbian, Gay, Intersex & Transgender issues

Homophobia is alive and well in Australian. **Hetero-normativity** – the idea that the norm/the given is heterosexual and dominant and ‘right’, and that the ‘other’, the ‘different’, homosexuality is the unusual exception, is also a common way sexualities are discriminated against in our society.

In schools and workplaces, homophobic discrimination is most prevalent. Homophobic treatment of students and colleagues towards each others is debilitating, humiliating and creates shame and unnecessary self-doubt.

Equally as devastating, however, is the notion of **invisibility**. Tolerating and accepting diversity, as is often the aim where areas of discrimination and prejudice are an issue, often instead confers a disregard for students’ and colleagues’ sexualities – that somehow the acknowledgement of diverse sexualities does not include the welcome and free expression of those sexualities.

Schools, TAFEs and Early Childhood settings should foster environments where students and colleagues alike can be comfortable in the knowledge that expressing their identity, their sexuality or their gender identity should not impact their work, learning or social cohesion. Celebrating, rather than hiding, diversity is a widely accepted premise on many fronts and sexuality should be no different.

Using terminology that supports openness about sexuality and gender identity (as being one identity among many contributing to a person as a whole) rather than focussing on difference as a defining characteristic exposes the alternative of invisibility as the oppressive force that it is.

In all circumstances, privacy is paramount and no one should be forced to offer more of themselves than they are prepared to. However, privacy is not an excuse for ignorance.

**Homophobia** in society and in schools is as much about that hetero-normativity and invisibility, as much as outright discrimination and hatred. Breaking down stereotypes, confronting the prejudice of the ignorant and exposing ‘accepted’ norms related to approaches taken in schools around sex education and gender construction can be a powerful way educators as union members can actively combat homophobia in schools.

But certainly, discrimination on the basis of sexuality does not stop outside the confines of the workplace/education environment.

Above all, freedom of sexuality and gender identity, and the right to express those fundamental aspects of one’s being, is a **human right**. Unions and other humanitarian organisations often cite the oppression of non-heterosexuals in other countries in terms of the outright laws preventing full participation in society, or of hate crimes, and murder or violence against them, as abhorrent but exclusive from Australia. It must be acknowledged however that in Australia issues of due recognition of same sex couples, financial penalties imbedded in the superannuation and welfare systems, medical discrimination, religious discrimination and resulting rates of depression and suicide amongst the non-heterosexual community are all very real breaches of human rights, and education is a fundamental key to turning around such attitudes and realities.

The AEU is committed to abolishing homophobia, hetero-normativity and invisibility in education settings not only for our members and our students but in the broader community also.



## What Can I Do?

### Activism around Bisexual, Lesbian, Gay, Intersex and Transgender issues

#### Action component :

- End the invisibility of blgit issues in education settings.
- Some unions facilitate blgit networks, both email and local meetings, as support for members who wish to participate. Women who wish to be involved or activate a group in their area should contact their union rep or women's officer for information on what is available or ways to start up a network.
- Women can be involved in ensure diverse sexualities are covered within anti-harassment policies, programs for students, sex education programs and welfare/counselling approaches AS WELL AS similar approaches for STAFF in schools.
- Women can be part of union campaigns and activities that aim to ensure OHS policies acknowledge that bullying and harassment as a result of an employee's sexuality affects their working life as well as personal wellbeing/safety.
- There are many teaching packages that have been developed by departments, academics and unions alike that introduce sexuality and confront homophobia within the curriculum as well as recommending whole of school approaches to homophobia.
- Simple exercises that challenge homophobia, like the Heterosexuality Quiz, below, can be used for both students (of appropriate age) and colleagues/union meetings:

#### **So, You're A Heterosexual?**

- What do you think caused your heterosexuality?
- When and how did you decide you were heterosexual?
- Is it possible that your heterosexuality is just a phase that you may grow out of?
- Do you think your parents did something to you to make you become a heterosexual?
- Did you have bad relationships with people of the same sex when you were young?
- Is it possible that your heterosexuality stems from a neurotic fear of others of the same sex?
- Do your parents know you are straight?
- Do your friends and/or room mates know?
- As a heterosexual, do you discriminate in who you will sleep with, or will you sleep with anyone else who is straight?
- Are you straight because you can't get anyone of the same sex to go out with you?
- What would you do if your kids also decided they were heterosexual?
- Are you afraid that might happen?
- Do you really even think you should be around kids as an out heterosexual?
- Why do you insist on flaunting your heterosexuality?
- Can't you just be who you are and keep it quiet?
- A disproportionate majority of child molesters are heterosexual.
- Do you consider it wise to expose children to heterosexual teachers?
- Just what do men and women do in bed together?
- There seem to be very few happy heterosexuals. Techniques have been developed that might enable you to change if you really want to.
- Have you considered aversion therapy?

