

Coming Out Women Meeting #3: 3/2/11

HETEROSEXISM

The “isms” in our culture...most are at least addressed such as:

- RACISM: assumption and practice that there is only one (acceptable) race: the dominant one (white)
- SEXISM: assumption and practice that there is only one (acceptable) gender: the dominant one (male)
- AGEISM: assumption and practice that there is only one (acceptable) age: the dominant one (younger)
- CLASSISM: assumption and practice that there is only one (acceptable) way to be: the dominant one (upper-middle or upper class)
- ANTI-SEMITISM: assumption and practice that there is only one (acceptable) way to be: the dominant one (Christian or otherwise non-Jewish)
- ABLEISM and SIZEISM: assumption and practice that there is only one (acceptable) way to be: the dominant one (temporarily able and slender)

But one “is” is rarely addressed:

- HETEROSEXISM: assumption and practice that there is only one (acceptable) sexual orientation: the dominant one (heterosexual). Only that orientation is affirmed or acceptable. The lesbian, bisexual, gay male, or transgender (LBGT) orientation is ignored or abhorred. Heterosexism is so entrenched in our culture that most people would say they have never heard of it.

“Compulsory heterosexuality” is: _____

GETTING IN TOUCH WITH HETEROSEXISM

- I. Awareness and naming. How often so we see “normal, healthy examples” of people with sexual orientation or sexual identity other than heterosexual?
 - a. Statespersons, the Arts and Sciences: How many of the biographies of “great men” (or “great women”) describe them as LBGT? How often is “the record set (too) straight”? Plato, Alexander the Great, Tchaikovsky, Michelangelo, Alexander Hamilton, Chief Crazy Horse, Leonard Bernstein, Florence Nightingale, Willa Cather, Emily Dickinson, Virginia Woolf, Marlene Dietrich
 - b. Literature: “Hansel and Gretel,” “Snow White” and her prince. “Beauty and the Beast” does introduce some diversity since the male is at first a “grotesque beast” before he is transformed into the “handsome prince.”
 - c. Theater/film: From “Romeo and Juliet” to Broadway musicals
 - d. TV/Sitcoms: what percent feature healthy lesbian couples?

- e. Societal statements of heterosexual identity abound. LBGT people are often admonished: “Why do you have to flaunt it?” Yet look at examples of “flaunting of heterosexual identity”:
- Engagement rings, wedding rings! Announcements, showers, ceremonies in newspaper articles, endless office or family chatter about weddings, anniversaries, birth of children, divorce, grave markers (“Emily, wife of Harold”)
 - PDAs (public displays of affection): holding hands while walking down the street, in a mall, at dinner or a show. Dancing together in a “straight” environment. What courage/energy it takes to endure the “stares and glares” to which heteros are not subjected.
 - Greeting cards for wishing happy anniversary to two lesbians picture two ducks--or two bears holding paws
 - T-shirts (Mickey and Minnie—where are the two Minnies?)
 - Others?
 - Health history forms (doctor, hospital). Circle: M S W D
 - Other examples...?

“Heterosexual privilege” is: _____

- II. Know that non-heterosexual orientations (LBGT):
- a. Are normal. The APA (American Psychiatric Association and the American Psychological Association) have stated since 1973 that being homosexual is NOT a mental disorder.
 - b. Are moral and increasingly recognized as such by churches
 - c. But upset the “status quo” of the patriarchy: lesbians do not need men for our primary relationships. Sexist society MUST ignore/detest/ridicule us!
- III. Identifying and expressing feelings about heterosexism in healthy ways. Feelings:
- _____
- IV. Living with heterosexism (and other “isms”) every day. How to do it:
- a. Coping (sharing, walking, crying, writing) and... _____
 - b. Working to change it. What could I do individually and as part of a group?
- _____

