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May 2019

Homophobia and Heterosexism Working Definitions

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"Homophobia and Heterosexism Working Definitions" (2019). *The Committee to Eliminate Heterosexism and Homophobia*. Paper 165.

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Definitions

Homophobia -- general fear or hatred of gays or lesbians. Takes shape in everything from the wish to deny gays and lesbians freedom to express their affections as do heterosexuals to the extremes of physical violence/gay bashings. Primarily relevant to personal prejudice or discrimination.

Heterosexism -- institutionalized discrimination against gays or lesbians; or that which supports, at the level of social structure, personal prejudice (homophobia). Thus the ability of heterosexuals only to legally marry, to carry their spouse on insurance benefits, to file joint tax returns, to carry car or home insurance in both partners' names, to be teachers, priests, etc., etc., is heterosexism, because it institutionalizes prejudice against gays and lesbians. Heterosexism is the reason that fundamentalists' claims that they are the attacked, embattled group on the issue of gay rights is disingenuous, because their positions are supported by heterosexist legal, economic, political, and social structures.