

What is Heterosexism?

Heterosexism is the societal and institutional reinforcement of heterosexuality as the privileged and the norm; and the assumption that everyone does or should identify as heterosexual.

Heterosexism impacts everyone and happens on a variety of levels from:

- subtle to overt
- interpersonal and institutional
- unintentional and intentional

Additionally, heterosexism interacts with other systems of oppression (e.g., sexism, racism, ableism, classism, and ageism). Sexism and heterosexism particularly interact in that people who do not conform to stereotypical gender roles or gender expressions of the culture are often harassed on the assumption that they identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer.

Some Examples of Heterosexism:

- Universal recognition of marriages composed of one man and one woman but denying equivalent recognition to same-sex couples
- Providing health benefits to the opposite sex partner of an employee but not to a same-sex partner of an employee
- Prohibition of same-sex couples from joint adoption of children
- No federal protection from workplace discrimination based on sexual orientation
- Lack of authentic portrayals of people who identify as asexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, questioning, Two Spirit, and Same Gender Loving in schools and media

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