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## ABSTRACT

This roundtable offered a springboard for discussion on homophobia in the workplace in four major areas: education, industry, mental health, and public service. In the discussion on education, gay, lesbian, and bisexual (GLB) college students explored ingrained attitudes and beliefs that impact their college life. Other issues explored in academia were job safety, curricula, coming out, and the impact of institutional homophobia. Homophobia in the corporate world considered strategies to help GLBs throughout their careers. Gay professional athletes explored the obstacles in professional sports for gay men to come out, the employment obstacles for gay men (such as coaching jobs), and their thoughts about being constrained to the closet. Homophobia in the helping professions examined the prejudicial attitudes of mental health professionals regarding GLBs and the impact on service delivery. It also addressed the issues GLB ethnic minority therapists face including training and supervision needs, countertransference, and boundary concerns. In the public service field, a discussion was held on the effects that police force homophobia can have on both the force and the public. Sexual minorities discussed their experiences working for religious organizations and the strategies for coping with discrimination. (Lists 22 web sites and 103 references.) (JDM)

Running Head: HOMOPHOBIA IN THE WORKPLACE

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Homophobia in the Workplace: Impact, Obstacles, and Interventions

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## Abstract

This roundtable offered a springboard for discussion of homophobia in the workplace in four major areas:

### **Education**

- Homophobia and Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual (GLB) College Students – explored ingrained attitudes and beliefs that impact the experiences of GLB college students.
- Gay and Lesbian Educators – explored major issues for GLB individuals in academia, including issues of job safety, curricula, coming out, and the impact of institutional homophobia.

### **Industry**

- Homophobia in the Corporate World – addressed not only the obstacles that the GLB individuals face, but possible strategies to assist them throughout their careers.
- Gay Professional Athletes – explored the obstacles in professional sports for gay men to come out.

### **Mental Health**

- Homophobia and Heterosexism in the Helping Professions – Examined overt and covert prejudicial attitudes of mental health professionals regarding GLB individuals, and the impact on service delivery.
- Gay and Lesbian Mental Health Service Providers of Color – addressed the multifaceted issues GLB ethnic minority therapists may face including training/supervision needs, countertransference, and boundary concerns.

### **Public Service**

- Homophobia within the Police Force – explored the impact that homophobia within the police force can have for the force and the general public.
- Sexual Minorities Working for Religious Organizations – sought to help participants better understand the experiences of sexual minorities who are employed by religious institutions.

### **The Impact of Homophobia and Heterosexism on GLB College Students**

Environmental stressors such as homophobia and heterosexism, both active and passive, direct and indirect, naturally have an impact on the psychological health and feelings of comfort experienced by gay, lesbian, and bisexual college students (Meyer & Schwitzer, 1999; Reynolds, 1989; Waldo, 1998). Institutional homophobia and heterosexism are so strongly engrained in the university and college environment, that they are often overlooked. Programs are held in the residence halls where students are romantically matched with people of the opposite sex in a "dating game" format. Health insurance benefits are offered to marital spouses, but not same-sex partners in life-long relationships. Family student housing is only available to couples with a marriage certificate. Documentation and forms at various offices on campus ask for relationship status as married, single, or divorced, ignoring GLB people in committed same-sex relationships. GLB students are often not included with other groups of diversity or celebrations of multiculturalism; this exclusion often manifests as less funding and resources devoted to such student groups. The university may not employ any "out" faculty, or GLB research efforts may be covertly discouraged. These are examples of ways that colleges and universities contribute to a systematic environmental stress for gay, lesbian and bisexual college students.

The social environment of gay, lesbian and bisexual college students has not been sufficiently studied. Only in recent years has research begun to examine the environmental influences upon GLB people. Many studies that have examined constructs such as homophobia and attitudes towards gays and lesbians (D'Augelli, 1989; D'Augelli & Rose, 1990; Engstrom & Sedlacek, 1997; Herek, 1984; Malaney, Williams, & Geller, 1997) do so from the perspective of heterosexual students. While these studies do provide some insight into the social and psychological elements of the environment that negatively effects GLB people, it is unclear how

well they assess the actual experiences of gay and lesbian people. Very little empirical research has looked at the actual experiences of GLB people in college.

### **Homophobia in Schools: Educators Peer Out of the Closet**

In the past ten years, there has been an upsurge in the publication of books and article devoted to this issue of homophobia in schools (e.g., Diamant, 1993; Kissen, 1997). Although people are writing more about the topic, unfortunately the findings tend to indicate a sustained level of caution and hesitation to reveal one's sexual orientation due to the real threat of being harassed, fired, or even seriously injured (Schrier, 1996).

The literature is replete with narratives about openly gay and lesbian educators being fired or forced out of jobs. Walters and Hayes (1998) contend that "institutional homophobia," as sanctioned by social/cultural values and learning environments, perpetuate discrimination toward gays and lesbians as well as marginalizing their contributions in the field. A survey of gay, lesbian, and bisexual educators indicates that they are actively working to enhance the learning environment of their students through various empowerment strategies (Myrick & Brown, 1998). Other major issues discussed in the literature include an unwillingness to "get too close" to students for fear of implications, sorting out the nature of teaching gay and lesbian themed curricula and struggling with issues of revealing their own sexual identity and in what context/setting (Fassinger, 1993; Pugh, 1998; Savin-Williams, 1993).

Recommendations ranging from the importance of building a network among gay and lesbian educators (Kissen, 1997) to individual, systemic, and societal changes (Fassinger, 1993) all reach the same conclusion, more visibility will equal greater political and personal gains in the field of education. One step in this direction has been the formation of the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLESN, 1999) in schools across the country.

This roundtable will discuss the issues and obstacles facing gay, lesbian, and bisexual educators today. Personal narratives, anecdotal evidence and relevant research in this area will be

used to illuminate the concerns and needs of this population.



### **Homophobia in the Corporate World: The Glass Ceiling**

Throughout the last ten years there has been a major shift in the attitudes concerning the gay and lesbian population in industry. Hemphill & Haines (1997) explain that past attitudes have been geared toward silence, a tacit agreement of mainstream society to require lesbian, gay, and bisexuals not to disclose their sexual orientation. While some areas in the workplace are still not accepting toward the gay and lesbian population, the situation is getting better.

Many U.S. firms, according to Day & Schoenrade (1997), are incorporating diversity management into their human resource practices and some employers are including sexual orientation in their lists of major sources of diversity. Chung (1995) reports a few major environmental barriers that go along with disclosing one's sexual orientation in the workplace to include job discrimination, perceived inappropriateness of certain occupations for lesbians and gay men, homophobia, negative stereotypes, societal stigmas, and fear of AIDS in the workplace. Furthermore, another difficult issue in career development for gay men and lesbian women is the role of dual-career development for gay couples.

According to Prince (1995), while gay couples deal with many of the same issues as nongay couples in processing through stages of career development, they also cope with additional challenges, such as coming out to potential employers and integrating one's partner into business social situations. Fassinger's (1995) research expresses that lesbians often experience double or (for women of color) triple minority status in the workplace, and thus are subject to increased discrimination on the basis of their gender, sexual orientation, and ethnicity.

The purpose of this roundtable is to address the issues and needs of the gay and lesbian population in the corporate world. We will discuss not only the barriers that they face, but also strategies to cope and possibly change existing conditions.

### **Gay Men in Professional Sports: Obstacles in Coming Out**

The world of professional sports has always had an idealized view of the male athlete that consists of such attributes as being powerful, durable, and 'normal'. A 'normal' lifestyle for most people does not include the notion of a homosexual athlete. Many gay professional athletes are faced with the dilemma of coming out as a gay athlete or remaining in the closet and living a life filled with secrets and coyness (Hix, 1998). The dilemma occurs when a professional organization encourages the gay athlete to remain in the closet because they feel this type of disclosure to the public would be harmful for the organization's image (Barret, 1997). Many, if not all, professional sport organizations force gay athletes to lock themselves in the closet (Seligman, 1999).

Although the possibilities for gay men in sport seem to be limited, it appears the way to change people's views is if they are educated about gay athletes/men and how they are similar to all other individuals. Since society views athletes as heroic, it may be somewhat less threatening for gay athletes to speak out about their sexuality. If some athletes would take this chance, it could be the beginning of a greater understanding from society in regards to diversity, which in turn can possibly result in society's understanding of even more diverse ethnic/minority groups (Barret, 1997). One possibility for a positive change would be for athletic coaches to speak out in support of gay athletes and treat these professionals as they would any other professional athlete (Hix, 1998).

In conclusion, this roundtable will address the issues mentioned above as well as how these gay athletes live an external 'superstar' professional athlete's life, employment obstacles for gay men (such as coaching jobs), and the possible thoughts and feelings of these men about being constrained to the closet.

### **Minorities within Minorities: Gay and Lesbian Service Providers of Color**

Gay and lesbian clients have been shown to increasingly utilize mental health services (Jones & Gabriel, 1999). However, there is evidence of dissatisfaction with mental health services due to perceived heterosexist bias which has led to a recommendation by some researchers for matching gay and lesbian clients to gay and lesbian therapists (Gartrell, 1984; Isay, 1991; Rochlin, 1981). Given that matching is not possible in all cases, consider gay and lesbian ethnic minority clients who desire a gay or lesbian mental health service provider of the same group. These “minorities within minorities” are faced with special issues related to the interaction of their ethnic group membership and their sexual orientation.

Greene (1994) suggests that the stigma of homosexuality within African American, Asian American, Native American, and Latino groups creates specific stressors. These stressors include the complexity of integrating the two major aspects of their identity and the combined “triple jeopardy” of racism, heterosexism and for lesbians, sexism (Greene & Boyd-Franklin, 1996).

Furthermore, therapists who are members of these groups are faced with additional issues. Gay/lesbian/bisexual ethnic minority therapists may struggle with countertransference and boundary issues- especially if the gay/lesbian therapist is politically active (Gartrell, 1994; Gonsiorek, 1981; Greene, 1994; Pearlman, 1996; Smith, 1990).

Given these specific issues facing ethnic minority gay/lesbian mental health service providers, this roundtable discussion will address the following questions: What are the specific training and supervision needs of gay and lesbian therapists of color? What ethical dilemmas might ethnic-minority gay and lesbian mental health providers face? What are the cross-cultural

counseling implications? How can the counselor's multiple group identification be an asset to the therapeutic relationship?

This discussion is both timely and relevant given the scarcity of research in this area and the necessity for multicultural competency in the mental health profession.

### **Homophobia and Heterosexism in the Helping Professions**

The belief that homosexuality is a normal and healthy condition within the realm of human sexuality is not universally adhered to by all mental health practitioners. Historically, the depathologizing of homosexuality in the mental health field is relatively new. The American Psychiatric Association declassified it as late as 1973. At that time, 37% of APA members still believed homosexuality was a disorder (Berkman & Zinberg, 1997).

Despite raised consciousness in all areas of society, homophobia and heterosexism persist. Individuals in all occupations, including the helping professions, may harbor homophobic and heterosexist beliefs. Studies have revealed biased attitudes in social workers (Berkman & Zinberg, 1997), professional counselors (Rudolph, 1989), and psychologists (Wisch & Mahalik, 1999).

Heterosexual bias can reveal itself in many ways, and can have a detrimental impact on the treatment of lesbian, gay, and bisexual clients. In one study, 45% of clients interviewed reported experiencing homophobic treatment by their therapists including refusal to acknowledge their clients' sexual orientations, dismissing it as a fad, and making derogatory remarks (Nystrom, 1997).

The refusal or fear to assess for homosexual feelings can lead to misdiagnosis and failure to address what may be the most pressing issue in a client's internal struggle for self-acceptance. Internalized homophobia can be a correlate to other problems such as substance abuse, compulsive sexuality, depression, domestic violence, and eating disorders.

This roundtable discussion will examine some of the mental health issues relevant to Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual people and the various ways in which heterosexism and homophobia can be manifested in the therapeutic relationship, becoming a barrier to proper care. We will look

at common problems in assessment, diagnosis, and treatment, including an analysis of reparative therapies.

### **Homophobia and Police: Implications for Police Officers and the Public**

The intent of our discussion regarding the implications of homophobia within the police force will be related to two central topics. The first topic is the impact that homophobia has upon gay and lesbian members of the police force. The second topic will examine the possible ramifications that homophobia within the police force can have upon the public.

Several studies within the past fifteen years have attempted to examine the many factors that effect gays within law enforcement. This issue has been dealt with in several ways. The issue of counseling police on issues of diversity within their ranks has been one topic (e.g., Jones, 1995). Another study examined the effects status conflict and identity management for gays in law enforcement (Leinen, 1993). A British study (Burke, 1994) examined the role of the police as the regulators of deviance, and how that attitude affected individual homosexual and bisexual police officers.

In addition, several studies have examined the effects police force homophobia can have on the gay and lesbian population they serve. The degree of homophobia within a police force can have a direct bearing on the way in which crimes against gays (e.g., gay-bashing) are treated by law enforcement (Nardi & Bolton, 1991). Along similar lines one study (Waldron, 1996) examined the specific effects that police homophobia can have on lesbian women of color involved in domestic violence.

These particular topics have far reaching implications for the civil and human rights of the Gay and Lesbian communities yet remain greatly understudied by the academic community. Therefore, this roundtable will examine and discuss the various effects that police force homophobia can have on both the force and the public.

### **Being a Sexual Minority and Working for a Religious Organization**

This roundtable on being a sexual minority and working for a religious organization has two goals. The first objective is to have a discussion that will help participants better understand the experiences of bisexuals, gay men, and lesbians, who are employed by church institutions. The other goal is to talk about resources for coping with the experience and ways to combat homophobia.

To better comprehend the experiences sexual minorities have, it is important to understand how different religions handle the issue of sexual orientation (McSpadden, 1993). With over 200 religious bodies in the United States (National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., 1991), there are too many to cover during one roundtable. However, Nelson (1978) has organized the different viewpoints into three categories; rejecting-punitive, rejecting-nonpunitive, and accepting. Based on these divisions, roundtable participants can talk about which religions fall into which categories. For each of Nelson's groupings, a brief reading may be used to incite discussion. The readings will be from the writings of homosexual individuals who are or have been employees of various churches. For example, excerpts from Glaser's book, *Uncommon Calling* (1988), could be read to the group. Glaser is a gay Presbyterian who was denied ordination because of his orientation. Another reading might come from Lukenbill's examination (1998) of the Metropolitan Community Church of Austin, whose congregation is predominantly homosexual.

Nelson's three categories will also provide a framework for talking about the variety of experiences employees may have. Some church employees are open about their orientation, while others never discuss their sexuality. The lesbian or gay man who works for the Southern Baptist Church has a much different experience than a reverend of the Metropolitan Community



Church, which was founded for gay men and lesbians. For those who must endure homophobia/discrimination at work, there are resources to cope with it and methods for trying to overcome it within religion. The remainder of the roundtable will focus on a discussion of these resources and methods.

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## **GENERAL WEB SITES**

**[www.youthresource.com](http://www.youthresource.com)**

Resource for GLBT youth and has inclusive information for youth of various ethnic groups.

**[www.aglp.org](http://www.aglp.org)**

Association of gay and lesbian psychiatrists.

**[www.lagpa.com](http://www.lagpa.com)**

Lesbian and gay psychotherapy Association

**[www.qrd.rdop.com/qrd/workplace](http://www.qrd.rdop.com/qrd/workplace)**

GLB workplace resources

**[www.apa.org/divisions/div44](http://www.apa.org/divisions/div44)**

American Psychological Association Division 44: Society for the Psychological Study of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Issues.

**[www.aglbic.org](http://www.aglbic.org)**

Association for gay, lesbian and bisexual issues in counseling

**[www.blsg.org](http://www.blsg.org)**

Black, lesbian support group

**[www.alba.org](http://www.alba.org)**

Asian lesbian bisexual alliance

**[www.uic.edu/depts/quic/resources/queers\\_of\\_color.html](http://www.uic.edu/depts/quic/resources/queers_of_color.html)**

Resources for gay, lesbian and bisexual people of color.

## RELIGIOUS GROUPS – ORGANIZATIONS AND WEB SITES

To follow is a list of organizations and websites that can provide people with more information about various religions. Many of them are geared specifically for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (GLBT) people. They are for educational purposes only and not recommended as means of therapeutic support for clients.

**Affirmation** is a Methodist group that focuses on LGBT concerns. It is an independent, not-for-profit organization with no official ties to The United Methodist Church.

<http://www.umaffirm.org/index.html>

**American Anglican Council** consists of Episcopal Bishops, priests, deacons and laity, as well as affiliated parishes and national ministry organizations, who share a common, biblically orthodox, understanding of Christian Faith.

<http://www.episcopalian.org/aac>

**Chapel of Light:** This website serves as a "virtual chapel" to support LGBT Christians worldwide, that may not be welcome in their church home. Chapel of Light also offers support to LGBT Christians of all ages that may be struggling with their orientation as it relates to their faith.

<http://www.chapelofhope.org/>

**Dignity/USA** is organized to unite GLBT Catholics to develop leadership and incite Church reform.

<http://www.dignityusa.org/>

### **Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

<http://www.elca.org>

**Gay Christians** is an Internet network of affirmative and supportive chat channels drawing encouragement from a variety of faith traditions.

[www.gaychristians.org](http://www.gaychristians.org)

**Gay and Lesbian Arabic Society (GLAS)** is an international organization established in the U.S. in 1998. As the name suggests, it serves as a networking organization for Gay and Lesbians of Arab descent or those living in Arab countries. Their aim is to promote positive images of Gays and Lesbians in Arab communities worldwide. They also provide a support network for members while fighting for their human rights wherever they are oppressed.

[www.glas.org/](http://www.glas.org/)

### **Gay Workplace Issues Homepage**

<http://www.nyu.edu/pages/sls/gaywork/>

**In All Things Charity** is a Methodist coalition that supports the full participation of all God's children in the United Methodist Church (UMC). Its mission is to promote action and legislation that eliminates heterosexism in the Church.

[www.brdwymc.org/IATC](http://www.brdwymc.org/IATC)

**Queer Jihad** is geared for "queer Muslims" struggling to accept themselves and to gain acceptance/tolerance among Muslims.

[www.geocities.com/WestHollywood/Heights/8977/aboutqj.htm](http://www.geocities.com/WestHollywood/Heights/8977/aboutqj.htm)

**Queer Resource Directory/Religion** has links and lists for "things religious and things queer and things queerly religious."

[www.qrd.org/qrd/religion](http://www.qrd.org/qrd/religion)

**Religious Tolerance** offers, among many other things, information about the policies of religious groups towards GLBT individuals.

[http://religioustolerance.org/hom\\_chur.htm](http://religioustolerance.org/hom_chur.htm)

**Theology Library: Gay and Lesbian Catholicism:** a website that lists links to 68 essays on religion and homosexuality.

<http://www.mcgill.pvt.k12.al.us/jerryd/cm/gay.htm>





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