How Homophobia & Transphobia Hurt Everyone: Understanding the Impact

Fear of and discomfort with same-sex attraction, gender expressions that do not fit within conventional ideas about gender, and/or gender ambiguity foster disapproval, hostility, prejudice, and hatred toward lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. While LGBT people are impacted most directly, in reality, all people are negatively affected by these attitudes and behaviors.

For example, homophobia and transphobia:

- Reinforce rigid gender roles and limit the range of acceptable behavior for all women and men by defining “appropriate” behavior for males and females.

- Discourage emotional closeness and intimate relationships among same-sex friends.

- Discourage individuals from taking part in certain social activities. People who are heterosexual are discouraged from participating in lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender identified activities for fear of being labeled. People who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender are discouraged from participating in many heterosexually-dominated activities for fear of encountering hostility or discrimination.

- Can restrict communication, create trauma, or result in estrangement among families when one family member is lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender.

- Support stereotypes, giving us all a distorted and inaccurate view of reality.

- Pressure people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender to hide their identities, thereby denying positive role models to other people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender, and denying positive examples of LGBT identity to people who are heterosexual.

- Result in “lesbian-baiting” (an accusatory charge of lesbianism made toward women) being used to control women’s autonomy and question their femininity.

- Push heterosexual males to constantly prove their masculinity and thus their heterosexuality.

- Can condition and pressure heterosexual people to treat others badly and commit actions contrary to their basic humanity.
• Pressure some people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender to deny their identity and to fulfill heterosexual ideals, such as getting married and having a family. These relationships result in stress and emotional trauma for those individuals, their spouses, and children.

• Pressure young people to become heterosexually active to prove to themselves and others that they are “normal.” This premature sexual involvement can result in emotional damage, as well as increasing chances of teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.

• Can restrict education about sexuality and sexual behavior, resulting in incomplete sex education. Such a lack of information can contribute to the spread of STDs and HIV/AIDS.

• Can be used to stigmatize, silence, and target people who are perceived as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender but who are in reality heterosexual.

• Can cause individuals who are perceived as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender but who are in reality heterosexual, to lash out in anger, often violently, in reaction to being labeled, teased, or otherwise targeted for abuse. Their actions can result in injury and/or death, often to innocent bystanders (as in the case of several school shootings).

• Prevent people who are heterosexual from being exposed to, accepting, and benefiting from the experiences, insights, and contributions of people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender.

• Inhibit a unified and effective governmental and societal response to AIDS.

• Divert attention from more pressing and serious societal concerns, and diverts energy from the search for solutions to those concerns.