What are people so afraid of? Understanding Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia

Homophobia - an intense fear of or discomfort with homosexuals and homosexuality, and the hatred, disgust, and prejudice fostered by that fear. In common usage, homophobia is widely used to describe any belief or behavior which indicates fear, disapproval, or hatred of homosexuals or homosexuality.

Homophobia can be experienced at several levels:

1. the fear or hatred of persons who are or who are perceived as being lesbian or gay
2. the fear of being perceived as lesbian or gay
3. the fear of one’s own sexual or physical attraction toward members of the same sex (which is referred to as internalized homophobia)

The fear or hatred which comprises homophobia can be expressed outwardly through a variety of prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory actions or behaviors, such as:

1. expressing discomfort or disgust toward persons who are or who are perceived as being lesbian, gay, or bisexual
2. denying equal treatment to persons who are or who are perceived as being lesbian, gay, or bisexual
3. expressing hostility or violence toward persons who are or who are perceived as being lesbian, gay, or bisexual

Examples of Homophobia:

- Making negative assumptions about a person’s sexual identity based on dress, behavior, or personality
- Avoiding social situations or activities where you fear being perceived as lesbian, gay, or bisexual
- Being afraid of social or physical interaction with persons who are lesbian, gay, or bisexual
• Thinking of persons who are lesbian, gay, or bisexual only in terms of their sexuality, rather than as whole, complex persons
• Feeling that people who are lesbian, gay, or bisexual should not discuss or display their sexual orientation openly while people who are heterosexual may do so freely
• Assuming that persons who are lesbian, gay, or bisexual will be attracted to everyone of the same sex
• Feeling repulsed by displays of affection between same-sex couples, but accepting affectionate displays between heterosexual couples
• Harassing or engaging in violence against individuals who are or are perceived as lesbian or gay

**Biphobia** - fear or hatred of bisexual individuals displayed by heterosexuals, gay men, and lesbians.

**Examples of Biphobia:**

• Assuming that people who are bisexual are confused about their sexuality
• Assuming that people who are bisexual are promiscuous or cannot live monogamously
• Assuming that people who are bisexual are in denial about their homosexuality
• Believing that people who are bisexual engage in irresponsible sexual behavior and are the cause of spreading AIDS
• Believing that people who are bisexual who have opposite-sex partners are “betraying” lesbians and gay men or the LGBT community
• Assuming that people who are bisexual need both male and female partners to be satisfied
• Believing that people who are bisexual are attracted to everyone
• Assuming that “bisexual” means “available”
• Thinking that people identify as bisexual because it is “trendy”
• Not wanting to date someone who is bisexual because you assume that the person will eventually leave you for someone of another gender
**Transphobia** – a reaction of fear or hatred toward those whose gender identity or expression, or perceived gender, does not match their perceived sex, and/or the inability to deal with gender ambiguity; closely related to homophobia, in that homophobia is often based on gender cues rather than actual sexual orientation.

**Examples of Transphobia:**

- Teasing or belittling someone for non-traditional gender expressions, behaviors, or appearance
- Refusing to accept a person's expression of their internal gender identity or disregarding their stated gender
- Believing that a person is not a "real woman" or a "real man" if s/he is transgendered
- Intentionally using inappropriate gender pronouns to refer to transgender people or calling them “it”
- Assuming that transgendered people are "sick" or incompetent or that they are psychologically unstable
- Feeling discomfort or disgust which prevents someone from dealing with a transgendered person as they would any other person
- Dismissing someone’s gender identity as a phase or fad
- Assuming that people who cross dress do so for sexual gratification
- Harassing or engaging in violence against individuals who are or are perceived as transgender
- Belief on the part of lesbian, gay, or bisexual people that people who are transgender should not be associated with or be a visible part of the LGB community because of they are detrimental to the social and political acceptance of gays and lesbians