**Understanding Heterosexism**

Heterosexism is the system of oppression of persons who are lesbian, gay, or bisexual based on homophobia. It includes these three components:

- The assumption that all people are heterosexual.
- Prejudice and discrimination against persons who are LGBT based on the assumption that heterosexuality is the only "normal" sexual orientation and therefore preferable.
- Systemic display of homophobia in societal institutions, laws, and policies by excluding the needs, concerns, and life experiences of persons who are LGBT.

**Examples of Heterosexism:**

- Assuming that everyone you meet is heterosexual.
- Assuming that everyone has or is interested in having an opposite-sex partner.
- Assuming that all mothers and fathers are heterosexual.
- Assuming all sexually active women use birth control.
- Assuming that all unmarried people are "single," while in reality they may have a same-sex partner.
- Assuming all children live in families with a male-female couple in parental roles.
- Using language that presumes heterosexuality in others, such as husband or wife, instead of gender neutral language such as partner.
- Using official forms which allow only for designation as married or single.
- Denying equal employment benefits to people with same-sex partners (i.e. spousal insurance).
- Omitting any discussion of persons who are LGBT as part of educational curricula.

**Source:** Adapted from Safe on Campus resource manual - Duke University
**Heterosexual Privilege**

Heterosexuals have the privilege of...

- Living without ever having to think twice, face, confront, engage, or cope with anything on this page. Heterosexuals can address these phenomena but social/political forces do not require you do so.

- Marrying...which includes the following privileges:

- Public recognition and support for an intimate relationship.

- Receiving cards or phone calls celebrating your commitment to another person.

- Supporting activities and social expectations of longevity and stability for your committed relationships.

- Paid leave from employment and condolences when grieving the death of your partner/lover (i.e. legal members designed by marriage and descendants from marriages).

- Inheriting from your partner/lover/companion automatically under probate laws.

- Sharing health, auto, and homeowners' insurance policies at reduced rates.

- Immediate access to your loved ones in cases of accident or emergency.

- Family-of-origin support for a life partner/lover/companion.

- Increased possibilities for getting a job, receiving on the job training, and promotion.

- Kissing, hugging, and being affectionate in public without threat or punishment.

- Talking about your relationship or what projects, vacations, family planning you and your partner/lover/companion are creating.

- Not questioning your normalcy, sexually and culturally.

- Expressing pain when a relationship ends and having other people notice and attend to your pain.

- Adopting children, foster-parenting children.

- Being employed as a teacher in a pre-school through high school without fear of being fired any day because you may “corrupt” children.
• Raising children without threats of state intervention, without children having to worry about their friends rejecting them because of their parent's sexuality.

• Dating the person of your desire in your teen years.

• Living with your partner and doing so openly to all.

• Receiving validation from your religious community.

• Receiving social acceptance by neighbors, colleagues, and new friends.

• Not having to hide and lie about same-sex social events.

**Source: Adapted from 365-Day Odyssey through Sexual Orientation handbook.