

## HOW HOMOPHOBIA HURTS THE COLLEGE FRATERNITY

Homophobia is defined as the fear and hatred of people who love and who are sexually attracted to those of the same sex, which includes prejudice and acts of discrimination resulting from that fear and hatred. Derived from the Greek homos, meaning "same," and phobikos, meaning "having a fear of and/or aversion for," the term "homophobia" was coined by George Weinberg in 1972 in his book *Society and the Healthy Homosexual*.<sup>1</sup>

Like other forms of oppression, homophobia not only oppresses members of the target or minority groups (gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered people) but also, on many levels, hurts members of the agent or dominant group (heterosexuals). As a result, everyone eventually loses, and more specifically, the negative effect of homophobia on fraternities is enormous.

Fraternities increasingly are coming under intense scrutiny by college and university administrators to guard against acts of discrimination and harassment in all its forms. Many times, societal homophobia, as well as sexism and other forms of prejudice, compounded by peer pressure results in many of the negative actions associated with fraternity life including, for example, substance abuse (alcohol, drugs, etc.), "date" or "acquaintance rape," and other forms of harassment and violence.

Therefore, homophobic beliefs and actions not only pose potential harm to individuals of all sexual orientations, but also jeopardize the very existence of the fraternity itself. Despite this, most Greek educational efforts either fail to address homophobia altogether, or raise it simply as an isolated "side issue" unrelated to the other issues and concerns. In actuality, homophobia harms all brothers and the goals of the college fraternity.

The following list adapts the theory of Warren J. Blumenfeld from his book *Homophobia: How We All Pay the Price* to the college fraternity and the male experience.<sup>2</sup> This information may be useful to foster an educational dialogue about how homophobia hurts the college fraternity and to heighten awareness on issues of sexual orientation.

1. Homophobia jeopardizes brotherhood by inhibiting close, intimate friendships among fraternity men and their ability to show affection toward other men for fear of being perceived as gay.
2. Homophobia locks fraternity men into rigid gender-based roles that inhibit self expression and exploration of male identity. Men tend to foster anger toward homosexuality and gender roles due to their inability to settle their identity conflict and the impacts of social conditioning. Such practices restrict the development of a positive male identity, straight or gay.
3. Homophobia creates a negative environment for brotherhood by compromising the integrity of heterosexual fraternity men to treat gay people badly. As such, homophobia is used as a tool for men to prove their heterosexuality by acting in the role of "gay hater."
4. Homophobia creates an environment where fraternity men are expected to channel their feelings of affection or express emotions in potentially destructive ways. For example, fraternity men construct often dangerous and humiliating hazing rituals and consume excessive amounts of alcohol and drugs in order to allow men to touch or hug the skin of other men and/or to openly express their emotions with other fraternity brothers.

5. Homophobia can be used to stigmatize, silence, and target people who are perceived to be gay or labeled by others as gay. Such an environment may be hostile to these brothers and lead to negative harms that are often associated with being gay.
6. Homophobia creates an environment where fraternity brothers are sometimes pressured "to get laid" in order to establish their virility as heterosexual males and "real men." Men who do not "get laid" may risk being viewed as less than men or homosexual. Such environments lead to higher likelihood of rape and the sexual use of women as objects of sexual conquest.
7. Homophobia is one cause for premature sexual involvement, which increases the chances of sexually transmitted diseases such as AIDS/HIV and pregnancy. Fraternity men often may be pressured to prove their "heterosexuality" and "normalcy" by becoming sexually active. Such a perspective impairs educational efforts on safer sex and sexuality awareness in the college fraternity.
8. Homophobia restricts communication among fraternity brothers and diminishes the possibility of creating a true sense of brotherhood and community, especially when the fraternity learns that another brother is gay.
9. Homophobia prevents fraternity chapters from receiving the benefits of friendship and leadership offered by gay fraternity brothers. Fraternity chapters may blackball or kick out members who are suspected to be gay. At other times, the gay brother may leave the fraternity because of harassment and/or fear of violence.
10. Homophobia remains the highest cause for suicide among youth.
11. Homophobia compromises the entire learning environment on a college campus for all students.
12. Homophobia inhibits the appreciation of diversity in a campus community and adds to the harassment and violence toward all minority groups. Such an environment impairs the progress of educational efforts on multiculturalism and diversity by not recognizing gay students in the campus dialogue.
13. Homophobia saps energy from more constructive fraternity projects. The time and energy could be better spent doing brotherhood activities or philanthropy.

**Shane L. Windmeyer and Pamela W. Freeman, *Out on Fraternity Row*, Alyson Publications, 1998. All rights reserved.**

Notes:

1. George Weinberg, *Society and the Healthy Homosexual*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1972).
2. Warren J. Blumenfeld, *Homophobia: How We All Pay the Price*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992).

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## HOW HOMOPHOBIA HURTS THE COLLEGE SORORITY

Homophobia is defined as the fear and hatred of people who love and are sexually attracted to those of the same sex, which includes prejudice and acts of discrimination resulting from that fear and hatred. Derived from the Greek *homos*, meaning "same," and *phobikos*, meaning "having a fear of and/or aversion for," the term "homophobia" was coined by George Weinberg in 1972 in his book *Society and the Healthy Homosexual*.<sup>1</sup>

Like other forms of oppression, homophobia not only oppresses members of the target or minority groups (gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered people), but also, on many levels, hurts members of the agent or dominant group (heterosexuals).<sup>2</sup> As a result, everyone eventually loses, and more specifically, the negative effect of homophobia remains alive.

Sororities, partially because they comprise women, often are viewed as being less homophobic than their counterpart male fraternities. The impact of homophobia on sisterhood, however, is still very real and does threaten sororities. Many times homophobia, as well as sexism and other forms of prejudice, compounded by peer pressure, result in harassment and violence. Many people do not see the connections between themselves and people different from them who may be similarly oppressed. Women as a part of sororities can benefit from such a view of the links of oppression. Issues such as sexism, racism, homophobia, classism, ableism, anti-Semitism, and ageism, are linked by a common origin -- economic power and control.<sup>3</sup> Such a belief requires that in order to eliminate any one oppression successfully, all oppressions must be subsequently dealt with or else success will be limited and incomplete. Educational efforts among the Greek community need to reflect this theory of oppression to have an impact on the organizational culture.

Therefore, homophobic beliefs and actions not only pose potential harm to individuals of all sexual orientations, but also jeopardize sisterhood itself. Despite this, most Greek educational efforts either fail to address homophobia altogether, or raise it simply as an isolated "side issue" unrelated to the other issues and concerns. Such a practice will only continue to hurt Greek life. In actuality, homophobia harms all sisters and the goals of the college sorority.

The following list adapts the theory of Warren J. Blumenfeld, from his book *Homophobia: How We All Pay the Price*, to the college sorority and the female experience. It also mirrors ideas presented by Suzanne Pharr in the book *Homophobia: A Weapon of Sexism* to show the interrelated nature of the two forms of oppression for women. This information may be useful to foster an educational dialogue about how homophobia hurts the college sorority and to heighten awareness on issues of sexual orientation.

1. Homophobia jeopardizes sisterhood by inhibiting close, intimate friendships among sorority women and their ability to show affection toward other women for fear of being perceived as lesbian or bisexual.
2. Homophobia locks sorority women into rigid gender-based roles that inhibit self expression and exploration of female identity. As such, women may shy away from activities that could be denoted as "tomboy" and occupations that might traditionally be associated with masculine behaviors. Such practices limit the choices of women and restrict the development of a positive female identity--straight, lesbian, or bisexual.

3. Homophobia creates a negative environment for sisterhood by compromising the integrity of heterosexual sorority women. Lesbian baiting may be a common practice among some women to pressure and harass other women through calling, or threatening to call them, lesbians. As such, homophobia is used as a way to keep potential lesbians or bisexual women from joining the sorority, to be kicked out, and/or to show superiority as heterosexuals.
4. Homophobia can be used to stigmatize, silence, and target people who are perceived to be lesbian or bisexual and/or labeled by others as lesbian or bisexual. Such an environment may be hostile to these sisters and lead to harms that are often associated with being lesbian or bisexual.
5. Homophobia creates an environment where sorority sisters are sometimes pressured to conform to heterosexual norms of dating and expectation to have sex. Women who do not conform to such heterosexual norms may have their sexuality questioned by others in a negative manner.
6. Homophobia breeds an attitude of sexual conquest among men that can have a negative impact on women in sororities. Fraternity men often feel pressure to "get laid" to prove their virility as heterosexual males. Such environments encourage men to use women as trophies of sexual conquest and lead to higher likelihood of rape, sexual objectification and other forms of sexual abuse of women.
7. Homophobia is one cause for premature sexual involvement, which increases the chances of sexually transmitted diseases such as AIDS/HIV and pregnancy. Sorority women often may be pressured to prove their "heteronormalcy" by becoming sexually active. Such a perspective impairs educational efforts on safer sex and sexuality awareness in the college sorority.
8. Homophobia restricts communication among sorority sisters and diminishes the possibility of creating a true sense of sisterhood and community, especially when the sorority discovers another sister is lesbian or bisexual.
9. Homophobia prevents sorority chapters from receiving the benefits of friendship and leadership offered by lesbian or bisexual sisters. Chapters may blackball or kick out members who are suspected to be lesbian or bisexual. At other times, a lesbian or bisexual sister may leave the sorority because of harassment and/or fear of violence.
10. Homophobia remains the highest cause for suicide among youth.
11. Homophobia compromises the entire learning environment on a college campus for all students.
12. Homophobia inhibits the appreciation of diversity in a campus community and adds to the harassment and violence toward all minority groups. Such an environment impairs the



progress of educational efforts on multiculturalism and diversity by not recognizing gay students in the campus dialogue.

13. Homophobia saps energy from more constructive sorority projects. The time and energy could be better spent doing sisterhood activities or philanthropy.

**Revised from *Out on Fraternity Row: Personal Accounts of Being Gay in a College Fraternity*, edited by Shane L. Windmeyer and Pamela W. Freeman, Alyson Publications, 1998.**

NOTES

<sup>1</sup>George Weinberg, *Society and the Healthy Homosexual* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1972).

<sup>2</sup>Warren J. Blumenfeld, *Homophobia: How We All Pay the Price* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992).

<sup>3</sup>Suzanne Pharr, *Homophobia: A Weapon of Sexism* (Little Rock: Chardon Press, 1988).

Shane L. Windmeyer and Pamela W. Freeman, *Lambda 10 Project*.