Some Ways that Heterosexism and Homophobia Hurt Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered People

For those in the closet

- The necessity to lie and pretend constantly.
- Can't be affectionate with a loved one except when alone.
- Having to pretend the person you're with is not your lover whenever someone else is around.
- Having people try to "fix you up" with members of the opposite sex.
- Unsolicited advice such as "you'll never catch a man/woman if you act/dress like that."
- Assumptions that you and everyone else are heterosexual.
- Being around people who are "flaunting" their heterosexuality while having to hide your sexuality.
- Having a hard time finding/meeting other lesbian, gay or bisexual people.
- Thinking you are the only one.
- Thinking something is wrong with you.
- Never feeling that you fit in; constantly feeling uncomfortable.
- Never feeling safe/close to another person because of this secret.
- Feeling panic about being found out, and feeling like a coward or a dishonest person.

For those coming out

- Not just the fear expressed above (which is bad enough) but also the reality - the things you were afraid would happen actually do happen.
- Rejection from friends, roommates, hallmates, family and/or teachers.
- Rejection of your friends or your lover.
- Rejection of other things that are important to you -- your work, interests, etc.
- People refusing to accept your sexual orientation, seeing it as a phase, trying to convince you to change -- "see a psychiatrist" or "you'll grow out of it."
- Having to deal with fear and anger toward you from nearly everyone, including those who have been your best supporters on everything else.
- Losing your job, your living space and financial support.
- Getting lower grades than you think you deserve and wondering if this is why.
- Subtle rejection or distance from many people and having to wonder if it's real or not. Feeling crazy and all alone. Not having any reality checks.

For those who are already out of the closet

- The things you feared would happen don't happen just once, which is hard enough, but they happen regularly.
- Dealing constantly with homophobia and heterosexism.
- Dealing with put-downs, slurs, homophobic jokes, and being talked about or stared at by others.
- Not getting jobs nor into groups and organizations.
• Not getting accepted into graduate school.
• Being made into a special case - a "good" or "different" gay, lesbian or bisexual person.
• Any affection you show toward a same-gender person is seen as a sexual "come on."
• Encountering verbal or physical abuse/violence against you by total strangers just because of who you are.
• Encountering emotional abuse in the form of anti-gay graffiti, jokes and defaced posters.
• Subtle rejection and avoidance by friends and acquaintances who move slightly farther apart or cross the street when you walk by, then deny they are doing this.
• Not having guaranteed civil rights protection to grieve discrimination.
• Outright legalized mistreatment such as having children taken away, being denied access to your lover, and not getting employment benefits that are given to opposite sex partners.
• Mistreatment by police officers, who may blame the victim; law courts; and the prison system.
• Dealing with people's misinformation and AIDS fears.
• Getting psychiatric/psychological abuse when seeking help.
• Lack of role models and services that meet your needs as a gay man, lesbian, or bisexual man or woman. (IE, the library or bookstore may not stock newspapers, books or journals that cover the lesbian, gay and bisexual community.)
• Being in the position of having to educate heterosexuals about their own homophobia.
• Finding that programs and educational activities about heterosexism and homophobia are not a routine part of what's happening -- having to organize them yourself if they are to happen at all.