Lesson Plan 3

“That’s So Gay!”: Challenging Homophobia and Heterosexism

Summary
Homophobia and heterosexism can be huge hurdles in an LGBTQ student’s journey toward finding a positive sexual identity. Because Lesson Two (Born This Way: Developing a Positive Identity) helped students explore the positive aspects of their identity, this lesson will challenge them to consider some of the obstacles they may have to overcome as LGBTQ youth.

Goals
- Students will explore the causes and effects of homophobia and heterosexism.
- Students will consider the impact of homophobia and heterosexism on various parts of the community.
- Students will realize that they are not alone in the fight against homophobia and heterosexism.
- Students will gain strength and confidence to help them overcome prejudices stemming from homophobia and heterosexism.

Objectives
- Students will work together to generate practical ideas about how to work against homophobia and heterosexism.
- Students will discuss the effects of homophobia and heterosexism in various parts of their communities and lives.
- Students will begin the process of conceiving and building coalitions.

Supplies Needed
- “Community Map” worksheet (see “Resources” on page 5)
- “Coalition Building Worksheet” (see “Resources” on page 6)

Session Outline
As always, start the session by reinforcing the ground rules of your group – boundaries you have set to ensure that youth feel safe to talk openly with each other. For example:

- Keep the conversation door closed – everything said in this room stays in this room.
- Respect the person who is talking – listen to what they say until they’re done saying it.
- Understand that everyone’s opinion is valid – we don’t all have to think the same things.
- Don’t dump on people’s ideas – it’s fine to disagree, as long as you disagree respectfully.
Warm Up: Map Of My World  (20 minutes)

As students talk about homophobia and heterosexism, it’s important that they begin with a clear understanding of what these words mean. Divide students into groups of 3-5 (or pairs if working with a smaller group), and ask them to write a short definition of “homophobia” and “heterosexism.”

When students are finished writing their definitions, ask them to share their thoughts with the group. Encourage students to think critically about each other’s definitions. Before you begin the following activity, make sure students have a working understanding of “homophobia” and “heterosexism.”

HOMOPHOBIA: Negative feelings – especially of contempt, prejudice, or fear – toward LGBTQ people. Homophobia often manifests itself through hate-speech, discrimination, violence, or insults directed toward LGBTQ people.

HETEROSEXISM: The automatic assumption that people are heterosexual, or that opposite-sex attractions are more “normal” than homosexual attractions. Heterosexism may manifest itself in the belief that heterosexual people are entitled to certain benefits and opportunities that are often denied to LGBTQ people.

Hand out copies of the “Map Of My World” activity provided on page 5. Instruct students to rate each community space on a scale of 1-10 according to how often they experience homophobia and/or heterosexism in each of these places (1 = not very often; 10 = extremely often).

Stories about our encounters with homophobia and heterosexism can help us better understand how these forces affect our community. Encourage students to share real life examples of homophobia or heterosexism as they work through the map.

If students need clarification about a space on the map, use the following guide:

- Home: Immediate family, extended family and relatives.
- Alternative Homes: Foster care, group homes or other residential facilities.
- School: Place of learning or instruction.
- Friends: Peer groups within and outside of school.
- Extracurricular Activities: Activities or involvements outside of school that include volunteering, internships, clubs, sports, etc.
- Religious Spaces: Places associated with faith-based activities like churches, synagogues, mosques, and temples.
- Public Spaces: Also known as social spaces in which the general public typically gathers, like a town hall, park, or community center.

Discussion Questions: Map Of My World

- Where do you think homophobia comes from? What is its root cause?
- Tell a story of a time when you experienced or witnessed either homophobia or heterosexism in one of the places represented on the map.
- How do homophobia and heterosexism affect the way you act in each of these places?
- What examples, experiences, or stories did your group members share today that resonated with you the most? Why?
- What examples, experiences, or stories did your group members share today that surprised you the most? Why?
- In your opinion, which aspects of a community are most severely impacted by homophobia and heterosexism? Why?
- In your opinion, which aspects of a community can best support you in your fight against homophobia and heterosexism? Why?
Reflection: Map of My World (2 minutes)

(This statement can be read by a student or facilitator to close the “Map of My World” activity.)

It’s important for us to consider why people in each of these places are homophobic or heterosexist. Their ideas and opinions are a product of their culture, upbringing, beliefs, experiences, and relationships. While homophobic ideas may be frustrating or insulting, it’s important that we patiently work with people to help them better understand how homophobia and heterosexism affect our community. Change will not happen overnight. Although we will continue working to fight homophobia and heterosexism, it may take people a while to adapt to a new way of thinking.

Role Model (20 minutes)

Live Out Loud works to connect LGBTQ and allied youth with positive role models from the LGBTQ community. The role model for this lesson should be an individual whose story illustrates how homophobia and heterosexism permeate through different aspects of their lives such as their jobs, family, relationships, religion, etc. They will speak on how we can work together to combat homophobia and heterosexism.

The following questions will help the role model tell his/her story:

1. Where do you think homophobia comes from? What is its root cause?
2. What role model(s) in your life has given you strength in the face of homophobia and heterosexism?
3. Describe your “coming out” experience (if applicable, to your family, friends, co-workers, etc.). How did homophobia and/or heterosexism affect this process? Who has been the least supportive (or the most challenging)? Who has been your biggest supporter?
4. In what ways have homophobia and heterosexism interrupted different aspects of your life (home, work, friends, etc.)? How has it impacted you?
5. What was your most challenging encounter with homophobia and/or heterosexism? What lesson did you take away from it?
6. Who has supported you during times when you were confronted with homophobia and/or heterosexism? What role does their support play in your life?
7. How do you strive to counter homophobia and heterosexism in your daily life?
8. What gives you hope in the face of homophobia and heterosexism?
9. What advice would you give to youth who want to challenge homophobia and heterosexism but are not sure how to begin? What uplifting final words would you impart?

It’s important that students don’t simply listen to the role model’s story, but also become engaged in the conversation. Provide the following questions for the role model to ask students as a conclusion to his/her presentation:

1. In what ways have homophobia and heterosexism interrupted your life?
2. What do you do (or have you done) when confronted with homophobia and heterosexism? How do you take action or deal with homophobic and/or heterosexist people?
3. Who in your life do you consider an ally when it comes to challenging homophobia and heterosexism? How do they support you in these instances?
4. What are real ways in which the LGBTQ community and our allies can support each other in the face of homophobia and heterosexism?
Take-Home Assignment: Coalition Brainstorming (5 minutes)

Ask youth to consider their school as a space where they can challenge homophobia and heterosexism. One of our most effective tools in fighting oppression is coalition building. Coalition building is essentially building relationships with groups who can work together toward a common goal. For example, if your GSA, student government, and football team work together to develop a workshop to raise awareness about the dangers of bullying, you have built a coalition.

What coalitions can your students form within their school to work for positive change?

Distribute a coalition building worksheet (see “Resources” on page 6) to each student. Students will consider possible partnerships with different groups in their school and complete the worksheet to the best of their ability. The worksheet will serve as a helpful guide to thinking about how they can creatively engage the support of their best allies and most difficult opponents to widen the dialogue about homophobia and heterosexism.

Encourage students to complete this exercise together and share ideas about who would be beneficial for them to approach as a coalition partner.

Send Live Out Loud a story about the coalitions your group builds with other organizations! How did you initiate the coalition? How did you cultivate the relationship? What have you accomplished through the coalition? Email your story to info@LiveOutLoud.info and we’ll share your story on our website and Facebook page. You can help Live Out Loud inspire groups like yours across the country!

Resources on following pages...
Almost every LGBTQ person is likely to experience homophobia or heterosexism. Think about the places indicated on the map below…

- Rate each one on a scale of 1-10 according to how often you’ve experienced homophobia and/or heterosexism in each of these places (1 = not very often; 10 = extremely often).
- Share a story with your group about a time when you’ve experienced homophobia and/or heterosexism in one of these places.
One of our most effective tools in fighting oppression is coalition building. Coalition building is essentially building relationships with like-minded groups with the purpose of creating a united front. This practice enables activists to form partnerships that they might not have considered. These relationships can produce new ideas that one group may not have thought of on their own.

What coalitions can you build within your school to challenge homophobia and heterosexism?

Make a list of organizations in your school

1. ___________________________________________ □   6. ___________________________________________ □
2. ___________________________________________ □   7. ___________________________________________ □
3. ___________________________________________ □   8. ___________________________________________ □
4. ___________________________________________ □   9. ___________________________________________ □
5. ___________________________________________ □   10. ___________________________________________ □

Don’t forget that you can also create coalitions with influential people (teachers, principal, administrators, etc.)! Who are the influential people you could build coalitions with?

1. ___________________________________________ □
2. ___________________________________________ □
3. ___________________________________________ □
4. ___________________________________________ □
5. ___________________________________________ □

COMMON CAUSES – Which of these organizations and people share common concerns, issues, or interests with you? It might make sense to partner with these organizations and people to combine resources and ideas which both groups have developed independently. Place a check in the box of each organization and person that might have a common interest in your cause (fighting oppression, promoting equality, supporting political causes, etc.)

MUTUAL BENEFIT – In a good coalition, each partner benefits from the relationship. Pick five organizations or people with which you have a common cause. Which of these organizations or people would most benefit from a partnership with you? Which ones have the most to offer your group? For each one, answer the following questions.

Name of Organization or Person: ____________________________________________

What support can you offer them? ____________________________________________

What support can they offer you? ____________________________________________

Name of Organization or Person: ____________________________________________

What support can you offer them? ____________________________________________
What support can they offer you? ____________________________________________________________

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**Name of Organization or Person:** _______________________________________________________

What support can you offer them? ___________________________________________________________

What support can they offer you? ___________________________________________________________

**EASIEST** – Which two organizations or people will you have the easiest time creating a partnership with? Typically, these are organizations or people which your group already has a common tie to. This group might have already supported you in some way in the past and can be instrumental in supporting you in the near future.

**Name of Organization or Person:** _______________________________________________________

What do you have in common with this organization or person? (people, causes, etc.) ____________
________________________________________
________________________________________
________________________________________

**Name of Organization or Person:** _______________________________________________________

What do you have in common with this organization or person? (people, causes, etc.) ____________
________________________________________
________________________________________
________________________________________

**MOST DIFFICULT** – Which organization or person will you have the hardest time creating a partnership with? Typically, this is an organization or person whose concerns, issues or interests represent the opposite of what your group represents. However, consider the potential positive impacts of a partnership with them. What example can your two groups set for the entire school?

**Name of Organization or Person:** _______________________________________________________

What hurdles would you have to overcome to form a coalition with this organization or person? ____________
________________________________________
________________________________________
________________________________________
What benefits could be gained by forming a partnership with this organization or person?

__________________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________________

STRATEGIC – Which organization will be the most strategic for you to partner with? A partnership with this group may potentially open new doors that might not have been available to you otherwise and can lead to unexpected benefits.

Name of Organization or Person: ________________________________________________________________

What do you have in common with this organization or person? (people, causes, etc.) __________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________________

What benefits could be gained by forming a partnership with this organization or person?

__________________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________________