

# The Faces of Homophobia: Everyday resistance quantified...

FOR THE  
HAND

Once upon a time there was a young gay educator called Daniel Witthaus, discovered a framework for the types of homophobic people he would encounter, their typical characteristics and some options for responding.

In *Beyond 'That's So Gay': Challenging homophobia in Australian schools*, Daniel outlines Dr Betty Burzon's model, whilst updating and altering her 'homophobic types' for everyday Australian audiences.

Here are those 'types' in shortened summaries, and thereafter Daniel proposes a sixth type. By exploring these six homophobic types you can learn how to identify and respond to the behaviours and attitudes of students, parents, colleagues and, potentially, yourself.

## THE ROMPER STOMPER

- Feel vulnerable and constantly under attack;
- Mobilised to counterattack those things and people that threaten their well-being;
- Typically male, their definition of reality is described as 'narrow' and their outlook 'hateful'.

### Example:

- Media examples of those individuals who violently attack and sometimes kill gay and lesbian people.

### Typical statements:

- They refer to violent acts towards gay men and lesbians.

### What to do with Romper Stompers:

- No room for logic, no-win situation;
- Openly acknowledge their anger;
- Have a trusted male outline the legal implications for homophobic violence.

## THE FRUSTRATED BOGAN

- Trouble coping with reality, and shows inflexibility in adapting within their environment;
- Frustration is primarily handled using aggression;
- Emotion is an important weapon, often shown by lashing out.

### Example:

- Those that cannot order their own life, and therefore seek to disrupt the lives of others.

### Typical statements:

- 'They should all be put on an island and shot' or 'It's Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve'.

### What to do with Frustrated Bogs:

- Their anger is not about you; do not take it personally;
- Be patient in getting your message across; this may require interrupting;
- Place the emphasis in all discussions on them.

## THE POLITICIAN

- Conservative individuals who jump onto the nearest 'bandwagon' (e.g. polls);
- Desperate to fit in with the 'in-group' and be seen to distance themselves from the 'out-group';
- Avoid taking responsibility for their attitudes and actions.

### Example:

- See Canberra, your capital city or local government.

### Typical statements:

- Use 'most people say/thing' to justify their positions, 'it's a matter of common decency...', '... behind closed doors...' and 'I have spoken to [ultra-conservative] gay people and...'

### What to do with Politicians:

- Challenge their use of terms such as 'the majority' and 'most people' ('but what do YOU think?');
- Encourage them to take personal responsibility for their prejudice;
- Do not accept claims of what 'everyone' thinks and feels.

## THE SHEEP

- Thinkers who are dependent upon the opinion of others (i.e. the flock);
- Don't spend much time considering the consequences of discrimination;
- Their lack of a self-determined belief system paired with their apathy makes them dangerous in the hands of the wrong shepherd.

### Example:

- Sheep are present in every crowd and a lot of time observing those around them.

### Typical statements:

- They can be heard saying 'me too' and 'I saw this show once...'

### What to do with Sheep:

- Challenge their apathy and find a means to motivate them;
- Reward them for listening and being open to what you have to say;
- Encourage them to take personal responsibility for their prejudice.



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## THE STIRRER

- Attempts to exploit the fears and frustrations of the other homophobic types;
- Exploits people's ignorance and fear of difference;
- Adept at stirring up anger in others and experts in uniting and building cohesion against a 'common enemy'.

### Example:

- Media 'shock jocks'; religious right leaders; US-based TV evangelists.

### Typical statements:

- Include 'these people...', 'our children...', 'preying on...' and 'I've spoken to...and...' 'What to do with...'

### What to do with Stirrers:

- Be fully prepared to be challenged and unsettled;
- Manage your own anger; stay rational and focused;
- Rather than defend, shift the agenda to their need to direct hostility at gays and lesbians.

## But wait, there's more!

If you challenge the status quo, a homophobic person will say things to make you doubt yourself, overwhelm you, intimidate you, frighten you or even tire you. Knowing this ahead of time can be invaluable information. Yet the real art in challenging homophobia does not always come from staring down mean, angry homophobes. Challenging homophobia is most often needed with those around you. Partners, family, friends, colleagues and managers are often the most likely to say unhelpful and hurtful homophobic things, even if it is with the best of intentions.

## THE ALMOST ALLY

- Invariably well-educated and older people, often females, who pledge their LGBT allegiance;
- Often unaware of their own homophobia;
- Unwilling to put themselves in situations where they, or others, could assess them as prejudiced.

### Example:

- Can be found in positions of influence, for example as managers in areas such as education, health and community services.

### Typical statements:

- 'But I have gay friends', 'I've been to Mardi Gras/a gay bar' 'I know all that already' or 'I have done it'.

### What to do with Almost Allies:

- Do not assume that 'allies' are completely homophobia-free;
- Encourage them to attend regular challenging homophobia professional development;
- Remind them that we can all learn more about homophobia and improve our attitudes.



# Hopping on the Homophobia Scales: What does your homophobia weigh?...

The work of Kenton Miller and Mahamati (see *Not Round Here, 2000*) has given us **Dr Dorothy Riddle's Scales of Homophobic Attitudes**. This scale lists a range of eight attitudes towards lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) people from the least to most supportive.

The first four attitudes towards LGB people are said to be Homophobic Attitudes. The next four are referred to as Improved Attitudes.

**Hop on the Homophobic Scales, weigh yourself and see if you have any homophobic weight to lose.**

## Dr Dorothy's four 'homophobic attitudes' are:

### • Repulsion

People view homosexuality as unnatural, crazy, immoral, sinful, etc and encourage efforts to change LGBs, such as treatments and legislation. Known for extreme statements like 'AIDS is God's punishment upon homosexuals'.

### • Pity

Individuals see heterosexuality as the better option, described cleverly as 'heterosexual chauvinism'. Thus to be LGB is looked down upon and pitied. Known for comments like 'they can't help themselves'.

### • Tolerance

Folk who see homosexuality as a 'phase' to be grown out of or through. As with 'Pity', this implies that gays and lesbians are not mature or responsible people. Lesbians, gays and bisexuals are to be tolerated, or 'quite simply to be put up with'.

### • Acceptance:

People who believe they are exceedingly evolved. They find it difficult to comprehend that their attitudes suggest there is something left to accept. Their condoning non-heterosexuality implies a position of superiority. Known for that pearl: 'That's fine, as long as you don't flaunt it.'

## Dr. Dorothy's four 'improved attitudes' are:

### • Support

People may still have a basic intolerance of what LGB people do in bed, but believe in the safeguarding of everybody's rights.

### • Admiration

Acknowledging that surviving as LGB people takes strength; people with this attitude are willing to reflect on their own homophobia.

### • Appreciation

These are people who value diversity, and see LGB as a valid part of that diversity; people with this attitude are willing to challenge other people's homophobia.

### • Nurturance

People who nurture assume LGB people are indispensable in our society, view non-heterosexual people with genuine affection and delight, and are willing to be gay advocates.



After running this activity for well over a decade with those old and young, an obvious pattern has emerged. Where young people believe that LGBs choose their sexual identity, they will place themselves at the more homophobic end of the scale. Where young people have had positive exposure to LGB people (e.g. an aunt or a cousin) or believe they don't choose their sexual identity, they place themselves at the "Improved", or less homophobic, end of the scale. I believe there is further investigation of this that needs to be done.

Experienced LGBT advocate and friend to religious communities, Anthony Venn-Brown, is clear that in any everyday conversation he has with homophobic opponents he only has one goal: to identify where they are on this very scale and to shift them one step forward. In a world where people excitedly hope that things change overnight, Anthony's approach is a helpful one to set realistic goals for everyday change.

Dr Dorothy's Scales help put perspective on the concepts of Tolerance and Acceptance, long held up as a vision for heterosexual-LGBT relations in Australia. A quick perusal of the Scales is sobering, and shows us how conservative the goals of Tolerance and Acceptance really are. The fact that we have not achieved these more broadly shows how long the road ahead might be.

Kenton and Mahamati have also devised a complementary scale of attitudes for gay and lesbian people. This scale of attitudes demonstrates that LGB people can be as homophobic as anyone else.



# Are you all ready for this?:

## The Discount Model and Workplace Readiness...

The last Summary Series (Part Two; Schools) looked at the assessment of school community readiness for positive change. However it is not something that should be restricted only to schools. Mainstream services can benefit from looking at where they are on a continuum of change.

The first step on the road to sexual diversity in the workplace utopia is knowing which step to take. Most organisations will identify that they are "not ready" to affirm sexual diversity and challenge homophobia partially out of fear of the reactions in and outside of the organisation, partially out of fear of doing the wrong thing and partially out of fear of not knowing where to start. Yes, that's a lot of fear.

One way to overcome these fears and make a start is to provide said workplaces with the basic knowledge and skills, such as everyday strategies to respond to "that's so gay", to confidently support sexual diversity and challenge homophobia.

On the Beyond 'That's So Gay' Tour, every organisation was encouraged to assess how "ready" they were as a workplace. Rather than relying on "we are ready" vs "we are not", workplaces were asked to rate themselves using **The Discount Model**. The Discount Model is an opportunity to begin thinking about how to quantify the resistance to supporting sexual diversity and challenging homophobia in everyday settings. It not only explains an individual or group's resistance, it can give clues as to what information and strategies might be effective in 'moving' that individual or group from one stage of resistance to the next.

The Discount Model's five stages are: **Significance, Existence, Solvability, Self and Action.**

### Where does your workplace sit?

#### 1. Existence: 'I think there is no problem'

*"We don't have any gay clients..."*

The starting point for the Discount Model is Existence, where workers refuse to believe that an issue exists. To apply this to the current situation, stage one is characterised when it is not accepted that non-heterosexual clients exist, and/or that their service experience is problematic.

At the Existence stage, a workplace is ready to hear that a problem exists, perhaps through good quality professional development. Hence there is an opportunity to make it impossible for workers to deny the existence of non-heterosexual clients or that their service experiences are significantly more problematic than for their heterosexual counterparts.

#### 2. Significance - 'The problem exists but it's not very serious'

*"Why should we overreact?...It's just one or two clients..."*

Continuing with the Discount Model, in the second stage – Significance – workers play down the seriousness of the problem at hand. For the purposes of the current situation, stage two is apparent when workers believe that significant numbers of non-heterosexual clients do not exist, and/or that the impact of their sexual identity on their service experience is not really the organisation's concern.

The Significance stage sees a workplace ready to acknowledge that a problem exists. Opportunity lies in workers seeing unambiguously that there are significant numbers of gay and lesbian young people and that their service experience demands the organisation's attention.



# Are you all ready for this?:

## The Discount Model and Workplace Readiness...

### 3. Solvability - 'There is a problem but there is nothing we can do to stop it'

*"What difference could we make anyway given their parents/the media/society..."*

The third stage of the Discount Model – Solvability – sees workers acknowledge that a significant problem exists, yet believe it is something that cannot be solved by the organisation itself, if at all (i.e. it's often in the 'too-hard basket').

Now in the Solvability stage, a workplace is ready to comprehend solutions. Workers will be more prepared and open to being convinced that their organisation can solve the problem of gay and lesbian young people's negative service experience and the impact of homophobic bullying.

### 4. Self - 'I can't do anything; that's for the experts'

*"I'm not gay, nor am I a gay expert so I can't do this..."*

In the latter stages of the Discount Model comes the stage of Self. Now aware that affirming sexual diversity and challenging homophobia is an achievable and doable prospect, workers abdicate responsibility to 'experts'. There is a strong belief that, as individuals, they are unable to contribute significantly to any solution.

At the Self stage, a workplace is open to the idea of staff effectively supporting sexual diversity and challenging homophobia. Here there is an opportunity to assure workers that they can do something themselves to improve the problematic service experience of non-heterosexual young people, rather than relying only on 'experts'.

### 5. Action - 'I can do something, and I will'

*"Thanks, I'm going to do this first thing tomorrow..."*

Action is the final and most exciting stage of the Discount Model. Workers are now aware that they personally can make a difference in the service experience of same sex attracted young people, and therefore all their clients. What this stage requires is that they now make a commitment to take action.

Based on what you've read, how ready do you think your workplace is to support sexual diversity and challenge homophobia?

Typically organisations require good quality professional development as a starting point to improve their "readiness". Once a workplace has identified where they sit, they can confidently plan what will move them from their current state of resistance/readiness. Based on previous successes, there are clear steps a workplace can take to make a difference in support sexual diversity and challenging homophobia regardless of which Discount Model Stage they are in.

For an extensive discussion and exploration of how to move a community successfully through The Discount Model read **Daniel Witthaus' Beyond 'That's So Gay': Challenging homophobia in Australian schools** (Hawker Brownlow Education, 2010)

