

Being a Minority Guided Imagery

GOAL: Increase participant's empathy about what it is like to be a minority.

TIME REQUIRED: 30 to 45 minutes

MATERIALS: None

PHYSICAL SETTING: Preferably in a setting that is quiet and that participants can sit in a relaxed position.

PROCESS: Have participants get in a comfortable position. Begin with deep breathing or muscle relaxation exercise. When participants are relaxed, read the following guided imagery.

I'm going to take you through a typical day. The only change is that now ten percent of the population is heterosexual (non-target) and ninety percent of the population is homosexual (target). You wake up Monday morning and begin getting ready for work. You kiss your opposite sex partner goodbye and head off to work. You listen to the radio in the car. The top 40 station is playing the latest love songs. You hear music by Indigo Girls, Ferron, and Suede. All of the songs are professing love for a same sex partner. You turn the radio to an oldies station. Again all the music is about same sex relationships. You turn the radio off and put in an audiotape that you bought two weeks ago at the only "straight" bookstore in the city. As you drive down the highway you look at all the billboards. Each of them is selling a product with couples holding each other and laughing. All the couples are of the same sex.

You walk into your office and all of your colleagues are standing around the coffee machine. You go to your office, put your briefcase on the floor and walk with your mug in hand to get coffee. They are all talking about their weekends. John and Jim went to the park and had a picnic with their best friends Tim and Mike. Sally and Jennifer took their two children to the zoo and children's museum. They ask you how yours went. You pause as a hundred things run through your mind. "Do you tell them that your lover is of the opposite sex?" "Do you once again use an inaccurate pronoun when talking about your partner?" "How do you explain that you drove four hours away to the only heterosexual bed and breakfast around. You just wanted to enjoy the weekend with your lover without worrying about how the other guests will react when you ask for one room with one bed?" As all of this is racing through your mind you hear yourself say that not much happened. That the weekend was fine. As you walk away you feel left out once again. Later that day you are in the bathroom and you overhear two colleagues talk about you. They are discussing how you never invite anyone over to your house from the office. They think it is so sad that you are still single at your age. However they've gotten tired of trying to set you up with dates. You always make an excuse not to go. One of them says that they heard you were straight. The other one gasps and says it can't be true. They have known you for three years and you're just too nice of a person to be like that.

The day is over. You head home looking forward to seeing your partner. You go to turn on the radio. The same old gay and lesbian singers. You turn it off and ride home in silence.

After the guided imagery is complete ask participants:

- 1) How they felt throughout the day?
- 2) What were they feeling and thinking as they listened to the radio and saw all the billboards?
- 3) What was their reaction while overhearing their colleagues talk about them?
- 4) What other thoughts or feelings did you have while doing the guided imagery?

Note that this guided imagery can be used for any minority (target) group. Within the guided imagery, change the scenario so that the target group (homosexual, racial/ethnic minority, disabled, etc.) are the ones who have the most power in the society. That means they have the economic, political, and legal ability to shape society in their image and to their advantage. Have the non-target group (heterosexual, Euro-American, physically abled, etc.) be in the minority.

SOURCE: This outline was written by Rosemary E. Simmons, Ph.D., Southern Illinois University at Carbondale. The original source is unknown. Dr. Simmons first heard it being used by Dr. Sandy Colbs from Virginia Commonwealth University.