

A Workbook For Feeling Better About Our Lesbian Selves

This book of exercises can be done alone or in groups.

It works best with a facilitator and a small group,
and can be run over a day, weekend, or several weeks.

Thanks for the inspiration and borrowed exercises from Greater Expectations by Tricia Szirom + Sue Dyson



Out For Action: Enhancing Lesbian Lives, Resource Kit, 1998
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1. Introductions

Acknowledgement of Country, House Rules...Confidentiality

pick 2 or 3 faces and emotions that match how you feel today and discuss briefly with each other

How Do You Feel Today ?

Aggressive	Agonized	Angry	Anxious	Apologetic	Arrogant	Bashful
Blissful	Bored	Cautious	Cold	Concentrating	Confident	Curious
Demure	Determined	Disappointed	Disapproving	Disbelieving	Distasteful	Eavesdropping
Ecstatic	Enraged	Envious	Exasperated	Exhausted	Frightened	Frustrated
Grieving	Guilty	Happy	Horrificed	Hot	Hungover	Hurt
Hysterical	Indifferent	Idiotic	Innocent	Interested	Jealous	Joyful
Loaded	Lonely	Lovestruck	Meditative	Mischievous	Miserable	Negative
Obstinate	Optimistic	Overwhelmed	Paranoid	Perplexed	Purlish	Puzzled
Resentful	Relieved	Sad	Satisfied	Shocked	Sheepish	Smug
Sulry	Surprised	Suspicious	Sympathetic	Thoughtful	Undecided	Withdrawn

Prepared by The National Institute of Corrections



2. We are all here today because we believe there is room to feel better about our self esteem.

What is Self Esteem ? - it's the value you put on yourself

High Self Esteem, is the satisfaction and confidence you have in yourself as a person.

Low Self Esteem is holding a negative view of yourself as a person.

There are many reasons why women in general suffer from low self-esteem. perceived lack of self-worth, relationship break-ups, high levels of anxiety or stress, inability to think positively, mild depression, and many other issues affect the self-esteem of millions of women every day. Many of these relate to the context of our lives and the fact that women are more likely to experience discrimination and abuse.

As lesbians we experience both discrimination against women and discrimination against our sexual identity and these exercises and group discussions are designed to help us explore and increase our understanding of why we might experience low self esteem and how we might change that so we can feel confident about ourselves and satisfied with our lives.

Our self esteem changes depending on the situation we find ourselves in, our confidence at that time and the support we might be receiving.

It can be helpful to tune into our feelings about ourselves and rate our self esteem from time to time, to notice when our self esteem drops or raises,

to be mindful of

- what has been happening,
- who we have been seeing and
- the self talk we have.

What we learn about ourselves through this process can be used to change our negative self talk, develop healthier boundaries around other people and to counter the impact of a less than perfect world by reminding ourselves of our true value.

Circle the number that best describes your self esteem last week

Extremely Low
ie, I am worthless

Low
I just cope

Don't know/Middle
I feel numb

Positive Esteem
I am an OK person

High Self Esteem
I feel good about me

1. -----2.-----3.-----4.-----5.



3. Messages

Fill in the following sentences, this will take some time. Then share your responses, exploring the similarities and differences and the impact that these messages have had on our lives.

1. When I was younger the messages I got about lesbians from my mother were

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

2. When I was younger the messages I got from my dad about lesbians were

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.....
.....
.....
.....
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3. When I was younger the messages I got from school about lesbians were

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.....
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4. When I was younger the messages I got from my friends and peers about lesbians were

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.....
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.....
.....
.....



5. When I was younger the messages I got about lesbians from the general community were

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.....
.....
.....
.....

6. When I was younger the messages I got about lesbians from TV, movies, books and the media were

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

7. Where did you learn about orgasms + masturbation?

.....
.....
.....

8. Where did you learn about lesbian sex?

.....
.....
.....

Discussion questions

What was it like to answer these questions?

What were the common threads of the answers to these questions?

How did these messages about lesbians impact on your life?

Were there any differences related to age, culture, class or race that you can see?

4. Draw a picture of a lesbian here



Improving Lesbian Esteem

Discuss stereotypes their difficulties and helpfulness

Jack Draper



5. I am Worksheet

Complete the following sentences in a way that makes them true for you:

a. I feel pleased with myself when

.....
.....
.....

b. I get mad when

.....
.....
.....

c. I look forward to

.....
.....
.....

d. I get frightened when

.....
.....
.....

e. I like the way I

.....
.....
.....

f. I feel happy when

.....
.....
.....



Improving Lesbian Esteem

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g. When someone criticizes me I

.....
.....
.....

h. The best work I ever did was

.....
.....
.....

i. I get angry with myself when

.....
.....
.....

j. I like the way I

.....
.....
.....

k. I don't like the way I

.....
.....
.....

l.
.....
.....makes me laugh

m.
.....
.....makes me cry

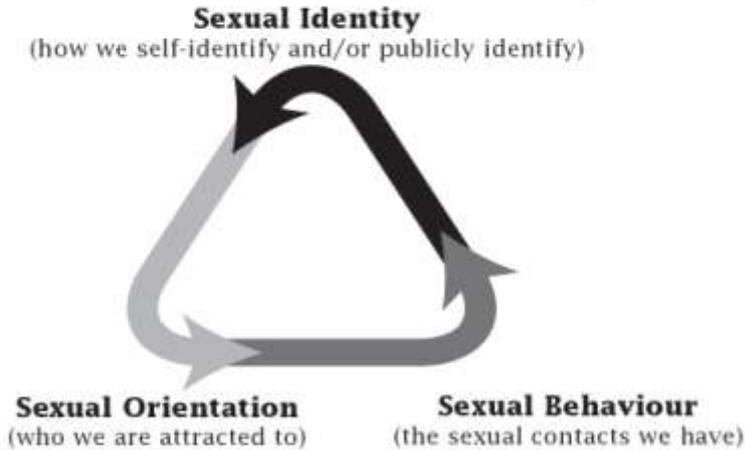


6. Lesbians who are we?

We have talked about what self esteem is, so lets check in about who we are as lesbians.

Discuss this diagram as it describes the 3 aspects of our human sexuality.

The sexual trichotomy



Write or brainstorm all the names that same sex attracted women are called, that you have ever heard someone refer to us as, no matter how cool or how disgusting we find it, eg dyke

Then write or brainstorm the names of Opposite Sex Attracted Women eg straight

Same Sex Attracted

Opposite Sex Attracted

Note any themes to the lists , commonalities and differences, including the use of reclaiming words



7. Glad To be A Woman

1. Write down some Negative messages I have received about being a woman

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

2. What was the impact of those particular negative messages about being a woman?

3. Re write the negative messages as affirmations..(change them into positive statements). You may need to help each other with this task.

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

How did the negative messages about being a woman impact on our lesbian selves?



Discrimination impacts negatively on the mental health of lesbians + their children leading to higher levels of depression, anxiety disorder, self harm + suicidal behavior.

Lesbians experience discrimination daily

We are seen as defective, deviant and immoral

We are shamed and punished for being women loving in a woman hating environment

We challenge male authority and male access to women in a heterosexual patriarchy just by our existence

“As long as lesbians and gay men are denied participation in all aspects of public life, real equality will never be achieved. To a large extent, forced invisibility is what homophobia is about. It ensures that lesbians and gay men, to the extent that they are perceived as violating those gender norms upon which heterosexual male dominance is based, remain silenced and hence invisible. Any attempt to achieve true systemic equality will thus fail in so far as it denies and fails to address the very real consequences of systemic homophobia on lesbians and gay men and on society as a whole. Discrimination does not exist in a vacuum. To the extent that some people, like myself, identify or are identified as non- heterosexual, our oppression, our reality, will continue to serve an insidious purpose -- the maintenance of compulsory heterosexuality as an oppressive institution central to the preservation of heterosexual male dominance and those inequalities which result from gender polarity”

Homophobia as an Issue of Sex Discrimination: Lesbian and Gay Equality and the Systemic Effects of Forced Invisibility

Christopher N Kendall BA (Hons), LLB, LLM, PhD

Associate Professor, Murdoch University School of Law

Discuss the Riddle Homophobia Scale and Lesbophobia as described on the next page

Riddle Homophobia Scale

Homophobia is defined as the irrational fear of homosexuals, homosexuality, or any behavior, belief, or others which does not conform to rigid sex role stereotypes. It is this fear that enforces sexism as well as heterosexism.

Homophobic Levels of Attitude

- 1. Repulsion** Homosexuality is seen as a crime against nature. Gays/lesbians are sick, crazy, immoral, sinful, wicked, etc. Anything is justified to change them: prison, hospitalization, negative behavior therapy, violence, etc.
- 2. Pity** Heterosexual chauvinism. Heterosexuality is more mature and certainly to be preferred. Any possibility of becoming "straight" should be reinforced, and those who seem to be born that way should be pitied.
- 3. Tolerance** Homosexuality is just a phase of adolescent development that many people go through and most people grow out of. Thus, gays/lesbians are less mature than heterosexuals and should be treated with the protectiveness and indulgence one uses with a child. Gays and lesbians should not be given positions of authority because they are still working through their adolescent behavior.
- 4. Acceptance** Still implies there is something to accept. Characterized by such statements as "you're not a lesbian, you're a person" or "what you do is your own business" or "it's fine with me, just don't flaunt it."

Positive Levels of Attitude

- 5. Support** Work to safeguard the rights of lesbians and gays. People at this level may be uncomfortable themselves but they are aware of the homophobic climate and irrational unfairness.
- 6. Admiration** Acknowledges that being gay/lesbian in our society takes strength. People at this level are willing to truly examine their homophobic attitudes, values, and behaviors.
- 7. Appreciation** Value the diversity of people and see gays/lesbians as a valid part of that diversity. These people are willing to combat homophobia in themselves and others.
- 8. Nurturance** Assumes that gay/lesbian people are indispensable in our society. They view gays/lesbians with genuine affection and delight, and are willing to be allies and advocates.

Taken from Wall, V. (1995). Beyond Tolerance: Gays, lesbians and bisexuals on campus. A handbook of structured experiences and exercises for training and development. American College Personnel Association.



Lesbophobia = hatred + irrational fear of lesbians

- **Sexism** a belief in the superiority of men
- **Misogyny**..... hatred of women
- **Homophobia** irrational fear + hatred of lesbians + gays
- **Heterosexism**placing more value on heterosexual relationships

Both lesbophobia and homophobia are

- Institutionalised
- Personalised
- Internalised
- Cultural

In Australia we now have a specific law to stop us marrying. This is an example of institutionalised lesbophobia.

personalised lesbophobia can be heard in the many derogatory comments lesbians hear in public and from their families. It has been common for lesbians to be banished from their families, to experience verbal abuse and to experience a less than satisfactory if not rude service, and at times have service refused. Has this ever happened to you?

Internalised lesbophobia is destructive and comes down to us believing the negative messages we hear like "she is defective", or "something is wrong with her" and us repeating the messages unconditionally to ourselves. This can lead to poor self esteem, depression, self harm + suicide addictions and the silencing of lesbians who are out and loud.

Cultural lesbophobia is apparent in mainstream pornography where lesbian presence is clearly for the sexual gratification benefit of a man or when we are continually asked "Do we have a boyfriend?"

Examples of discrimination

...discuss or contemplate what you would do if this happened to you?

1. Your boss tells you to wear more femme clothes to work, you are looking too like a man.
2. Your parents leave everything to your brother in their will.
3. You get knocked back on a rental property in favour of a newly married couple.
4. The Dr tells you don't need a pap smear.
5. Your kids are on detention for fighting with kids who have been calling out "Your mums a lezzy"
6. Lesbians are told they are not welcome in this church.
7. Your girlfriend is not invited to her families xmas celebrations.
8. You are not invited to your girlfriends family celebrations.
9. You are refused a room with a double bed at the motel you and your girlfriend booked for a holiday.
10. You are told it is just a cat fight when you call the police fearful about your girlfriend's behaviour.
11. Someone spray paints the words "diesel dyke" on your car
12. You are invited to your sisters wedding but not your partner.
13. Your neighbour hurries his children inside when you are out the front of your house.



This is to read later.....

Lesbian health inequalities: a cultural minority issue for health professionals

Ruth P McNair

MB BS, DRACOG, DA, Senior Lecturer and
Director of Undergraduate Studies.

ABSTRACT

□ Health inequalities exist for lesbian and bisexual women, largely related to experiences of discrimination, homophobia and heterosexism. These issues can lead to avoidance of routine healthcare and screening and reduced disclosure of sexual orientation within consultations.

■ Lesbian and bisexual women have specific healthcare needs in areas of sexual and cervical health, reproductive health and parenting, mental health, substance use, and ageing.

■ Facilitation of disclosure of sexual orientation, identity and behaviour within the consultation is desired by most lesbians and important for addressing specific health needs.

■ Healthcare providers should develop “cultural competence” in lesbian issues to enhance their care of lesbian and bisexual women.

■ Healthcare providers have a role in promoting awareness of lesbian health issues and inequalities in the arenas of healthcare provider education, research and health policy.

SEXUALITY

Countries such as the United States and Canada did provide some insights into the specific health needs of lesbians,¹⁸ albeit with a limited evidence base. The past decade has seen both increased population-based studies, enabling comparison of sexuality minorities with heterosexuals, and an increased variety of methods (eg, network sampling and various qualitative methods) for attempting to access hard-to-reach subgroups.¹⁷ We now have a better understanding of specific risk factors and healthcare needs of non-heterosexual women in areas such as sexual health, reproductive health and parenting, mental health, substance use, and ageing.

Sexual health. Seventeen per cent of self-identified lesbians in the United States report having a diagnosis at some stage in their lifetime of sexually transmitted infection (STI), the same percentage as that reported for population-based representative samples of women.¹⁹ While transmission is partly related to previous or current sexual contact with men (78% had had at least one previous male sexual partner¹⁹), STI rates also increase linearly with the number of lifetime female sexual partners. These data contradict the common assumption of low STI risk with female sexual partners, clearly pointing to the need for improved advice regarding “safe sex”. Conversely, one comparative study suggested that lesbians were more likely than heterosexual women to practise safe sex.¹¹

Reproductive health. Reproductive healthcare needs of lesbians are highly specific, with a majority electing to

achieve pregnancy via self-insemination with a known donor’s semen or via clinic-based donor insemination.²⁰ These women require a practitioner who is knowledgeable about appropriate donor-insemination clinics for referral and can provide information, for those using self-insemination, about optimal donor screening, ovulation monitoring and safety during the period of insemination. Australian lesbians wanting to form a family report their key challenges as a lack

of access to clinic-based donor insemination in some states, and a lack of social and legal recognition of their family structure and of the non-biological mother as a parent.²⁰ Twenty-seven per cent of Australian lesbian and gay parents report negative experiences with their children’s healthcare that relate back to their own sexuality.²¹ The American Academy of Pediatrics supports coparent adoption by same-sex

parents and advocates that paediatricians be knowledgeable about gay and lesbian families.²²

Mental health. A higher rate of mental illness among lesbian and bisexual women than women in the general population is one of the most concerning health inequalities. Lesbian and bisexual women report rates of depression, anxiety disorders and suicidal ideation that are two to three times higher than women in the general population.^{23,24}

Although studies usually do not distinguish between lesbian and bisexual women, there is some evidence from an Australian community sample that bisexual people have an even higher prevalence of mental health problems than lesbian and gay people.²⁵ These mental health inequalities are thought to relate to high levels of stress due to homophobia, higher rates of abuse and experiences of victimisation, and lack of social support, rather than to sexuality per se.²⁶ Improved research methods have uncovered an increased risk of “stress-sensitive disorders” attributable to the effects of homophobia.²⁷ Comparison with heterosexual people shows that lesbian and gay people with mental illness have suffered significantly more day-to-day and lifetime discrimination, almost half of which they directly relate to their sexuality.²⁸ Same-sex-attracted young people are also found to have higher rates of depression, drug use and homelessness than the general population of young people.⁵ This in part relates to the fact that, unlike other cultural minorities, same-sex-attracted young people cannot necessarily rely on support and protection from their family of origin. Conversely, active

participation in community support groups and other forms of support improves mental health status.



Improving Lesbian Esteem

Jack Draper

9. Lesbian Health Inventory Worksheet

Fill this table in as best you can

Healthy Behaviour	Like me	Not like me	I will change	Blocks to Change
Balanced diet				
Regular exercise				
Non smoker				
Limited alcohol intake				
Regular dental checks				
Avoids drug use				
Comfortable weight				
Regular sleep each night				
Sleep soundly				
Healthy eating habits				
Eat a nutritious breakfast				
Regular health checks				
Breast self examination				
Pap smears				

I intend to (action) by / / (date)

I intend to (action) by / / (date)

I intend to (action) by / / (date)

I will know when I have achieved this when I

.....



10. IMAGINE

Have this read to you

Close your eyes + make yourself comfortable and imagine.

You are walking along a street. The surroundings are familiar and you realise it is your home town. You see a calendar and the date is 100 years into the future.

You have been transported forward in time and as you look around you, you sense that everything is very different. The air is clean, people seem happy, friendly with each other and relaxed. You feel at ease, there is no sense of threat or harm anywhere. You stroll into your favourite part of town. What can you see? How does it feel? What can you hear? You notice close by a woman sitting quietly and you join her.

You sit together and talk. You tell her that you are from the past and comment on the differences you have noticed. The woman laughs and explains to you that the differences are because true peace has been achieved. Global and local disarmament, equality between men and women, an end to all discrimination and stigma of lesbians and gay men, environmental recovery, no more hunger and poverty, no more exploitation.

You feel yourself drifting, very relaxed and happy. You realise you are being drawn back to your own time and that you just have time to find out from the woman how peace was achieved. The woman gives you a message to take back to your own time. You bid her farewell and now you are aware it is the present again.

When you are ready open your eyes and write down the message you were given.

She said.....

.....
.....
.....

How can you use this message?

.....
.....
.....

What changes can it make in your life?

.....
.....
.....



11. personal purpose Worksheet

1. List 15 -20 words that describe your best qualities

1	11
2	12
3	13
4	14
5	15
6	16
7	17
8	18
9	18
10	20

2. Now list 10-14 things you are good at and/or enjoy doing.
Don't restrict yourself, they can be anything at all.

1	8
2	9
3	10
4	11
5	12
6	13
7	14

3. In this space list your words or phrases which describe the world as you would like it to be. What is your ideal?

.....
.....
.....



4. Look back over your list and circle 3 words that best describe you;
then circle three things that you do best
then circle the three words or phrases that best describe your ideal world.
5. Finish the sentence below using the words from the lists.

My purpose is to use my

.....
my.....
And my

So that I can

.....
.....
and.....

In order for the world to be

.....
.....
.....

Read these to each other or to yourself in the mirror



12. I Am Strong Lesbian Worksheet

Think about all the ways that you are strong and write them down here.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Stand up one at a time and tell the rest of the group (or the mirror) in an assertive and positive manner
"I am a strong lesbian. I am strong because (list the things written above)



13. Personal Action Plan

Complete the following

1. I want to achieve the following goals

- ...
- ...
- ...
- ...
- ...
- ...

2. The things that might stop me from reaching my goals:

- I lack the necessary skills
- I fear failure
- I don't feel supported
- I lack motivation
- The goal is too difficult
- ...
- ...
- ...
- ...
- ...

3. The following actions and people might help me overcome these obstacles

actions	people



4. List some of the negative things that might happen if I achieve these goals;

.....
.....
.....

5. List some of the good things that would result for me

.....
.....
.....

For others

.....
.....
.....

6. The first steps I will take towards achieving this goal:

.....
.....
.....



14. Fear of success Worksheet

1. My biggest fear which prevents me getting what I want is

.....
.....
.....

2. In the past this fear has

.....
.....
.....

3. To overcome this fear would mean that I

.....
.....
.....

4. To keep the fear would mean that I

.....
.....
.....

5. If I didn't have this fear I would be

.....
.....
.....

6. What can I replace it with that will serve me better?

.....
.....
.....

7. Write yourself an affirmation to overcome this fear

.....
.....
.....

8. Read it to yourself 3 times



15. Promoting Me

Rate yourself on the following list of qualities

1 = very much me

2 = sometimes me

3 = not me at all

(You can add words too)

I am

Neat

Organised

Friendly

Enjoy children

Write well

Willing to learn

Good with numbers

Assertive

Able to admit when I am wrong

Learn quickly

Outgoing

Honest

Can remember names

An ideas person

Creative

.....

.....

Tidy

punctual

Good with people

a good speaker

Nervous

Good at accepting change

Can keep a secret

Good at systems

Able to accept responsibility

Shy

Confident

Dependable

Hardworking

Artistic

Supportive

.....

.....

.....

Now write a paragraph describing yourself drawing from the words you have selected as being "very much me".

Then you will be asked to read this to the group.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....



16. Reflections

Circle the number that best describes your self esteem now

Extremely Low
ie, I am worthless

Low
I just cope

Don't know/Middle
I feel numb

Positive Esteem
I am an OK person

High Self Esteem
I feel good about me

-----2.-----3.-----4.-----5.

What has the impact of doing these exercises been on how you feel about yourself?

If you would like to give feedback to me about what in this booklet helped you understand more about lesbians and self esteem or what you thought was missing, please email me at jackdraper@gqpt.net.au

Thanks Jack Draper 2011

