

That's so straight!

by Laura Critchley

How many times have you heard it? "That's so GAY!" Apparently almost everything in the world around us is homosexual!:

"That album's so gay."

"That book's so gay."

"That lesson's so gay."

Many people don't realise this, but, using "gay" as an insult is a hate crime. As obvious by the word "crime" this is illegal. Not only is it illegal; it can be extremely demeaning and hurtful to people that do identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Trans.

The Home Office website describes a hate crime as:

"Hatred is a strong term that goes beyond simply causing offence or hostility. Hate crime is any criminal offence committed against a person or property that is motivated by an offender's hatred of someone because of their:

race, colour, ethnic origin, nationality or national origins

religion

gender or gender identity

sexual orientation

disability"

Statistics prove that most hate crime offenders are young white males and those that are most homophobic are aged 16-20. Putting that in perspective, that includes a lot of people within this college. Don't take this wrongly; this doesn't prove that every young white male within college is homophobic, biphobic or transphobic. It just means that the college environment could have a lot more homophobia/biphobia/transphobia than what everybody sees on a day to day basis. A lot of bullying is hidden and unreported; just how much is happening within our college that we don't know about?

When many people consider hate crimes they often only think of racism; but, hate crimes based on a person's sexuality or gender identity are just as harmful and common (if not more so) than racist hate crime.

According to official statistics 7% of people in the UK can identify as an ethnic minority whereas 10% can identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans. (transgender, transsexual and transvestites).

If these statistics are correct, then, surely and logically, shouldn't homophobia/biphobia/transphobia be on the same level as racism?

One of the biggest problems with identifying homophobia/biphobia/transphobia is that a lot of people don't really know what constitutes as homophobic/biphobic/transphobic abuse.

The Home Office website suggests that any of the following actions motivated by any of the differentiating factors mentioned above is classed as a hate crime:

Physical attacks – such as physical assault, damage to property, offensive graffiti, neighbour disputes and arson

Threat of attack – including offensive letters, abusive or obscene telephone calls, groups hanging around to intimidate and unfounded, malicious complaints

Verbal abuse or insults - offensive leaflets and posters, abusive gestures, dumping of rubbish outside homes or through letterboxes, and bullying at school or in the workplace.

Using words that are offensive and based on someone's sexuality or gender identity are bullying; a hate crime...

ILLEGAL.

Nationally, in 2006-07, police reported 5,619 hate crimes in which someone was injured, 4,350 hate crimes without injury and 28,485 cases of racially or religiously motivated harassment.

There were also 2,565 cases of criminal damage related to hate crimes.

Most LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans.) people don't report hate crime. There's a standing opinion within the LGBT community that nothing will be done if they report a hate crime. On top of that, since the hate crime laws were brought in nobody has had charges pressed against them based on a hate crime against someone's sexuality or gender identification despite many people having charges pressed against them for racially motivated hate crimes.

You might not think that some of these words are harmless and not important, but, if one person takes offence to them then that's one person too many.

So next time you want to insult something or someone, just bear in mind that someone nearby might take offence to what you're saying; so try and refrain from calling something

or someone gay because each time you do you are associating homosexuals with something you consider rubbish.

Remember, if one person takes offence; than that is one person too many