

What Does It Really Mean to “Affirm” Versus “Promote”?

by Evonne Hedgepeth, Ph.D.

Administrators who develop specific programs or non-discrimination policies to address the unique needs or realities of GLBT youth, clients or employees often fear they will be accused of "promoting homosexuality."

Dr. Evonne Hedgepeth has created the following tool to explain the difference between **AFFIRMING** a group (or affirming respect for diversity in general) and **PROMOTING** a particular group.

Many administrators and front line staff given this tool during training on GLBT issues have praised its usefulness in handling actual or anticipated opposition to a wide variety of diversity-related programs and policies, not just those related to sexual orientation or gender identity diversity.

Affirm versus Promote: Definitions and Notes

1. Definitions: (Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language, 1996)

- Disparage: *to belittle, demean, ridicule, discredit*
- Deny: *to refuse to recognize or acknowledge*
- Acknowledge: *to admit to be real or true; recognize the existence of*
- Affirm: *to state or assert positively (about a group)*
- Promote: *to further, advance, or exalt; put in a higher position (than another group)*

2. Because individual attitudes and practices are slow to change, organizational climate typically lags at least one step behind official policy: *for example, if the organizational policy is to acknowledge, most individuals will continue to deny.*

3. *Remember. Promoting diversity is not the same thing as promoting a group:
To spend public resources to promote diversity (i.e., respect for all) is a reasonable and productive organizational goal, and does not equate with promoting any particular group.*

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Permission is granted to photocopy *What Does It Really Mean to "Affirm" Versus "Promote"?* to distribute as a handout in training. While it is not necessary to obtain prior written approval, appropriate credit to Dr. Hedgepeth is much appreciated.

What Does It Really Mean to “Affirm” Versus “Promote”?

Disparage*	Deny*	Acknowledge*	Affirm*	Promote*
WOMEN are weak, irrational, more susceptible to influence, and inferior to men. Men should protect and control them.	Women and women’s issues are excluded from history books, policies, positions of power and even written and spoken language.	Women exist and have many of same needs/ interests/abilities as men. Many have made unique contributions. They deserve fair treatment.	Women have unique strengths and qualities, beyond procreative powers. Are essential part of human diversity. Women’s ways of being are valuable.	Women’s qualities are better than men’s (men are deficient). Society would be better off if women, rather than men, were in control.
PEOPLE OF COLOR are naturally deficient in some way and inferior to white people. Whites should hold the power in society.	People of color (and their issues/ contributions) are excluded from history, policies, positions of power and language/ discourse.	People of color exist and soon will represent the majority in the US. They have many of same needs/interests/ abilities as whites and have made unique contributions. They deserve fair treatment.	People of color have unique strengths and qualities and represent an essential part of human diversity, which enriches our society and institutions.	The qualities of people of color, because of their unique experiences, make them superior to white people. Society would be better off if “minorities” were in control.
JEWS are usurers, historical Christ-killers and a threat to society.	Jews (and Judaism as a faith) are excluded from history books, policies, positions of power, official holidays and discussions of religion.	Jews exist and are not that different from non-Jews. They have made many unique contributions and deserve fair treatment.	Jewish people have unique strengths and qualities and represent an essential part of human diversity, which has enriched our society and institutions.	Judaism is superior to other religions. Preferably, everyone should be Jewish.
CHRISTIANS are close-minded bigots who want a government controlled by Christians. They are a threat to democracy.	Christians (and Christianity) are excluded from history books, policies, positions of power, official holidays and discussions of religion.	Christians exist and have much in common with non-Christians. Many have made unique contributions to society. They deserve fair treatment.	Christian beliefs/ traditions underlie much that is valuable in our culture. Christianity represents an important part of religious diversity.	Christianity is the one true religion. Preferably, everyone should be Christian and our institutions should be based solely on Christian beliefs.
GAYS, LESBIANS, BISEXUALS AND TRANSGENDERS are immoral and a danger to children and institutions. People shouldn’t be GLBT.	GLBT people and their contributions are excluded from history books, policies, positions of power, and language/discourse.	GLBT people exist and share many qualities with non-GLBT people. Many have made unique contributions to society. They deserve fair treatment.	GLBT people represent a valuable part of human diversity and enrich our society in many ways.	Being GLB is preferable to being heterosexual. Being transgendered is better than being non-transgendered.

[* See Definitions and Notes on page 1]

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