

Critical dialogue helps straight men confront sexist, homophobic beliefs

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Adult heterosexual men with sexist and homophobic views can potentially improve their attitudes toward gay men and women by

engaging in critical dialogues that use illustrations as a springboard, according to a new University of Michigan study.

The work is [published](#) in the journal *Sexual and Gender Diversity in Social Services*.

The process by which people shift from a prejudicial stance to one of relative acceptance is a key innovation of the study. Guided by trained facilitators, critical dialogues reflect illustrations depicting different gender roles and sexual identities.

The images are designed to evoke feelings and opinions on masculinities and homosexuality, researchers said. By using critical [dialogue](#) data, the study shows a turning point that signals a change in participants' views—something researchers said their study aimed to accomplish.

While these findings are important, the researchers caution against generalizing them to other samples and contexts. This means further research is needed to explore the usefulness of this and similar interventions, aimed to abate homophobia and sexism in different populations and settings.

The study involved racial and ethnic minority men who developed critical reflection by relating their privileged status as heterosexual males to the oppression they experienced as [people of color](#). Participants viewed the images and answered questions about differences between men and women, same-sex behavior and values/expectations they wanted to pass down to their families and communities.

Rogério Pinto, the study's lead author and U-M professor of social work, said the findings indicate the use of illustrations and critical dialogues helped men of color to express homophobic and sexist opinions and behaviors in a structured manner conducive to the development of

critical reflection, a key ingredient for cognitive change.

"Our findings support the use of art forms, in this case illustration, as tools to help heterosexual men of color discuss and express their feelings and opinions and arrive at an emotional-social space of tolerance and (some) empathy toward gay men and women in general," Pinto said.

If society expects people to change their often volatile homophobic and sexist attitudes, it must also tolerate prejudicial expressions, even offensive ones, before critical reflection can be developed, Pinto said. Critical dialogues can be implemented in schools, [social services](#) and other practice settings to abate homophobia and sexism among adult men, the main perpetrators of homophobic and sexist acts, Pinto said.

The study is co-authored by Carol Lee, a U-M postdoctoral research fellow in psychiatry; Marc Arthur, assistant professor at Wayne State University; and Liliane Windsor, professor at the University of Illinois.

More information: Rogério M. Pinto et al, Iconic illustrations initiate critical dialogues among heterosexual men who then develop critical consciousness around homophobia and sexism: A qualitative study, *Sexual and Gender Diversity in Social Services* (2024). [DOI: 10.1080/29933021.2024.2354358](#)

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