

Sexual Prejudice and Gender: Do Heterosexuals' Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men Differ?

Gregory M. Herek
*Department of Psychology
University of California at Davis*

Journal of Social Issues, 2000, 56 (2), 251-266.

AUTHOR NOTE. Preparation of this paper was supported by grants to the author from the National Institute of Mental Health (R01 MH55468 and K02 MH01455). My thanks to Anne Peplau, Linda Garnets, and John Capitanio for their helpful comments on earlier versions of the manuscript. Requests for reprints should be sent to Gregory M. Herek, Department of Psychology, University of California, 1 Shields Avenue, Davis, CA 95616.

Abstract

This paper explores the question of whether and how heterosexuals' attitudes toward lesbians differ from their attitudes toward gay men. Data from a 1997 national survey are presented to show that heterosexual women generally hold similar attitudes toward gay men and lesbians, whereas heterosexual men are more likely to make distinctions according to gender. Moreover, men's attitudes toward lesbians are susceptible to situational manipulations. Nevertheless, the underlying unity of attitudes toward lesbians and gay men is demonstrated by the fact that they are highly correlated for both heterosexual men and women. It is suggested that heterosexuals' attitudes toward gay people are organized both in terms of minority group politics and personal sexual and gender identity, and that attitudes toward lesbians are most likely to be differentiated from attitudes toward gay men in the latter realm.

For much of the twentieth century, homosexuality's stigmatized status in the United States went largely unquestioned. By the 1970s, however, as the gay and lesbian movement began to effect significant changes in society, heterosexuals' hostility toward gay people became an object of scrutiny in both lay and scientific circles. The turnabout from treating homosexuality as a disorder to considering antigay hostility a problem was crystallized in the term homophobia, coined by psychologist

George Weinberg and introduced to the American public in his 1972 book, *Society and the Healthy Homosexual*.

Weinberg (1972) defined homophobia as "the dread of being in close quarters with homosexuals – and in the case of homosexuals themselves, self-loathing" (p. 4). In the nearly three decades since Weinberg's book was published, homophobia has entered the popular vernacular and can now be found in major dictionaries. It has also become widely used in the social and behavioral sciences. A computer search of the PsychINFO database in May, 2000, yielded more than 1,500 citations containing the keyword "homophobia."

However, the term has also been criticized, especially for its implicit assumptions that antigay attitudes and behaviors emanate mainly from fear and are best understood within an illness model (e.g., Haaga, 1991; Herek, 1984, 1991, 2000). As an alternative, I have recently proposed that the phenomenon usually labeled homophobia instead be called *sexual prejudice*, defined simply as negative attitudes toward an individual because of her or his sexual orientation (Herek, 2000).

Empirical study of sexual prejudice has necessarily entailed developing methods to assess it, and these methods reveal implicit assumptions about its nature. Most measures in this domain have defined their object of study in nongendered terms, that is, as attitudes toward *homosexuals* or *homosexuality*. Lesbians have

not been differentiated from gay men as a distinct target of prejudice (Kite, 1984; Kite & Whitley, 1996, 1998). This choice of operational definitions precludes the discovery of differences between heterosexuals' attitudes toward lesbians and their attitudes toward gay men. Moreover, because terms such as "homosexual" may be interpreted by many research participants as referring exclusively to males, this approach may yield little information about heterosexuals' attitudes toward lesbians.

A second operational strategy has been to measure heterosexuals' attitudes toward lesbians separately from their attitudes toward gay men (e.g., Herek, 1988; Herek & Capitano, 1995, 1996; Kite & Deaux, 1986). Although it is clearly an improvement over the earlier practice of ignoring attitudes toward lesbians, this approach also reflects an assumption, namely, that heterosexuals' attitudes toward lesbians and toward gay men are fundamentally part of the same phenomenon, that is, sexual prejudice. Individuals might vary in their attitudes toward the two groups, but these are assumed to be differences in direction or degree, not qualitative differences.

My goal in the present article is to reflect on the validity of these operational assumptions, and to consider how and why heterosexuals' attitudes toward lesbians and gay men might differ quantitatively or qualitatively. It is my hope that this discussion will suggest insights into the nature of sexual prejudice and will generate hypotheses for future research.

The Nature of Sexual Prejudice: Two Paradigms

The history of the contemporary gay and lesbian movement in the United States reveals two competing political strategies for changing the status of homosexual people in society. Each strategy suggests a different paradigm for understanding the roots of sexual prejudice.

The dominant strategy today is based on a reformist, minority group politics model and focuses on demands that homosexual people be accorded civil and human rights on a par with heterosexuals. This *gay rights* approach achieved dominance in the United States in the

mid-1970s – although many of its themes were anticipated by the post-World War II homophile movement (Epstein, 1999). The gay rights framework emphasizes the fact that lesbians and gay men (along with bisexuals and transgender individuals) now constitute visible communities with cultural traditions, physical boundaries, and political interests that are increasingly recognized by society at large. In other words, gay men and lesbians comprise a discrete minority much like an ethnic group. The gay rights framework suggests a minority group attitudes paradigm for contemporary sexual prejudice. By this I mean that attitudes toward gay people are psychologically similar to majority attitudes toward racial, ethnic, and other minority groups.

By contrast, *gay liberation* had the goal of radically altering society's view of sexuality and gender. It was briefly dominant in the United States in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Epstein, 1999). Inspired by New Left politics, the women's movement, and the struggles of racial and ethnic minorities at home and indigenous peoples abroad, gay liberation sought ultimately to free the bisexual potential in everyone and thereby to render obsolete such categories as "homosexual" and "heterosexual" (Adam, 1987; Altman, 1971). Around the same time, some segments of the *lesbian feminist* movement similarly asserted that all women were capable of being lesbians (e.g., Epstein, 1999; Rich, 1980). Although they differed in important ways and were not monolithic ideologies, we can detect in both the gay liberationist and lesbian feminist perspectives the arguments that categories such as homosexual and heterosexual are imposed on individuals by a patriarchal society, and that changing society requires (in addition to political action) changing oneself to realize one's homosexual potential.

This viewpoint suggests a different theory of sexual prejudice than the gay rights perspective. Rather than reflecting attitudes toward a subordinate, well-defined quasi-ethnic group, sexual prejudice instead is understood to be very much about attitudes toward oneself, specifically toward two distinct but closely

related aspects of personal identity. First, sexual prejudice is about attitudes toward one's own sexuality. As Kinsey and his colleagues (1948) recognized more than a half century ago, sexual behavior and experience exist on a heterosexual-homosexual continuum rather than in clear-cut categories. Many heterosexuals have engaged in homosexual behavior or experienced same-sex attractions, just as many gay and lesbian people have had heterosexual experiences. Consequently, mapping one's own experiences onto what is usually perceived as a dichotomous self-label (heterosexual or homosexual, gay or straight) is not always a simple task, and some individuals become confused or uncertain about their sexuality. Because of the stigmatized status of homosexuality, such individuals may experience anxiety at the prospect of being labeled gay or lesbian, which they may externalize in hostility or overt aggression toward gay people (e.g., Herek, 1984, 1986, 1987, 1992).

Within the liberationist framework, sexual prejudice is also about attitudes toward one's own gender identity. For much of the twentieth century, homosexuality was regarded as synonymous with gender inversion: Male homosexuals were presumed to be more like women than men, whereas lesbians were presumed to be more like men (e.g., Minton, 1986; Terry, 1999). Vestiges of this viewpoint persist today, with the consequence that being labeled homosexual refers to one's gender as well as one's sexuality. Therefore, expressions of sexual prejudice can demonstrate to others not only that one is heterosexual, but also that one measures up to cultural standards associated with one's gender role. In American society, men are particularly likely to experience strong pressures to make such demonstrations, that is, to affirm their heterosexual masculinity by rejecting gay men (Herek, 1986; Kimmel, 1997).

How does this discussion bear on the question of whether heterosexuals' attitudes toward lesbians differ from their attitudes toward gay men? I believe it suggests reasons why such attitudes should differ, as well as reasons why they should not. They should not differ to the extent that sexual prejudice can be

understood in terms of minority group politics, that is, when it is based mainly on evaluations of gay people as a distinct quasi-ethnic group, regardless of whether those evaluations are informed mainly by political or religious values, normative pressures from one's peers, or intergroup contact. For example, attitudes rooted in personal religious values typically reflect judgments about the morality of same-sex sexual relations and would not be expected, a priori, to differ dramatically according to whether the attitude target is lesbians or gay men. Similarly, attitudes based on personal interactions with either a lesbian or gay man appear to generalize equally to attitudes toward both homosexual men and women (Herek & Capitano, 1996).

But to the extent that sexual prejudice is based on attitudes toward one's own sexual or gender identity, it is highly likely to be expressed differently toward lesbians than toward gay men and the difference will depend on the heterosexual person's gender. When sexual prejudice functions mainly to demonstrate (to others or to oneself) a person's membership in the group *heterosexuals*, the goal is to disprove conclusively that one is a homosexual. Consequently, the most vociferous expressions of sexual prejudice are directed at the subgroup of homosexuals most directly relevant to a heterosexual person's own identity, namely, gay people of one's same sex. That is the group with which the individual does *not* want to be confused.

As noted above, demonstrating one's heterosexuality and, at the same time, one's gender-role conformity appears to be of much greater concern for men than women in American society. In this regard, Kimmel (1997) has suggested that the fear implied by the term homophobia is mainly heterosexual men's fear of being labeled homosexual by their male peers. Consequently, differences in heterosexuals' attitudes toward lesbians and gay men – to the extent that they exist – should result mainly from differences in how heterosexual men think about lesbians compared to gay men.

Empirical Assessment of Sexual Prejudice

In the following section, I present empirical data relevant to assessing whether and how sexual prejudice differs according to the gender of its target. These data address differences in the direction (i.e., positive or negative valence) and intensity of heterosexuals' attitudes, as well as differences in the psychological dynamics of attitudes toward lesbians and toward gay men.

Attitude Valence and Intensity

The first set of analyses addresses the question of whether or not attitudes toward lesbians and gay men differ in their intensity and their positive or negative valence. Public opinion data indicate that American adults have become increasingly supportive of basic civil liberties for lesbians and gay men, but their attitudes toward homosexuality continue to reflect moral condemnation and personal discomfort (Herek, 2000; Sherrill & Yang, 2000; Yang, 1997). Whether such evaluations are equally negative for lesbians and gay men appears to depend mainly on respondents' sex: Heterosexual men's attitudes toward gay men are significantly more hostile than their attitudes toward lesbians, whereas heterosexual women's attitudes do not evidence reliable differences according to whether the target is lesbians or gay men (Herek, 1994; Kite & Whitley, 1996).

This conclusion is based mainly on data from convenience samples of college students. Unfortunately, the generalizability of findings from such samples is unknown. The inherent limitations of data from nonprobability student samples are heightened by the fact that sexual prejudice is correlated with educational level and age (e.g., Herek, 1984, 1991). Thus, the range of two key demographic correlates of sexual prejudice is constricted in student samples. This shortcoming could best be addressed with data from national probability samples of adults in the United States. With few exceptions, however, separate assessment of attitudes toward lesbians and gay men has been rare. In Yang's (1997) review of 77 different items about homosexuality used repeatedly in public opinion polls, for example, only two items distinguished reactions to lesbians from

reactions to gay men.¹ As with standardized questionnaires, most national surveys have framed their target in ostensibly gender-neutral terms, using words such as *homosexual* or *gay* to refer to the entire population of gay men and lesbians. Others have assessed reactions to "gays and lesbians" or "gay men and lesbians" with a single item.

Complicating the issue further, specific question content has been conflated with type of sample. As Kite and Whitley (1996) found in their meta-analysis, national surveys with probability samples have generally focused on opinions about civil liberties and civil rights, whereas laboratory studies with convenience samples of students have focused on affective responses to homosexual behaviors or to gay men and lesbians as people (see also Herek, 1986). Patterns of sex differences in attitudes varied depending on the type of sample as well as the type of attitude being assessed. The most pronounced sex differences were observed among undergraduate students and in personal responses to gay men and lesbians as people – although items in national polls about gay parenting and military service also evoked pronounced sex differences in responses (Kite & Whitley, 1996).

What is needed, therefore, are responses from a probability sample of heterosexuals to items that differentiate affective responses to lesbians and to gay men. Some of my own national survey studies have assessed such affective reactions with 3-item versions of the Attitudes Toward Lesbians (ATL) and the Attitudes Toward Gay Men (ATG) scales, which contain sets of parallel statements that are highly indicative of a respondent's attitudes toward homosexuality (Herek & Capitano, 1995, 1996, 1999a). The ATL items (with ATG substitute wordings in brackets) are (1) "Sex between two women [men] is just plain wrong?"; (2) "I think female homosexuals or lesbians [male homosexuals] are disgusting?"; and (3) "Female [Male] homosexuality is a natural expression of sexuality in women [men]." Scale scores are computed by summing across items, with responses to the "natural" item reversed. Higher scores indicate higher levels of sexual

prejudice (for data on the psychometric properties of the ATL and ATG, see Herek, 1994).

Table 1 reports mean ATL and ATG scores from my 1997 national telephone survey, which was conducted by the Survey Research Center at the University of California, Berkeley, using a Random-Digit Dial (RDD) sample of 1,309 English-speaking adults residing in households in the 48 continuous states (for details about the survey methodology, see Herek & Capitano, 1999a, 1999b).²

For the moment, only the first two data columns of Table 1 are relevant. Each respondent portrayed in those columns was asked the three ATG items first, followed by the three ATL items. (Response patterns when the item order was reversed are discussed in a later section.) Heterosexual³ men's ATG scores were significantly higher (more sexual prejudice) than their ATL scores. Heterosexual women's scores did not differ significantly according to the gender of target.⁴ Although they differed in magnitude, ATL and ATG scores both were very highly correlated: $r = .87$ for women and $r = .78$ for men. Correlations across matching item pairs (e.g., the ATL and ATG versions of the "disgust" item) were similarly high (all r s > .70).

Insert Tables 1 and 2 about here

For another measure of attitudes, the 1997 survey also included a series of "feeling thermometers" about various groups, including "men who are homosexual" and "women who are lesbian, or homosexual" (Herek & Capitano, 1999a). Feeling thermometers are 101-point scales on which respondents report their general feelings of emotional warmth (high scores) or coldness (low scores) toward an individual or group (e.g., Sapiro et al., 1998). Table 2 reports heterosexual women's and men's mean thermometer ratings for lesbians and gay men. Once again, only the first two data columns of the table are relevant for present purposes.

Respondents' ratings of gay men were significantly lower overall than ratings of lesbians, and this effect resulted mainly from males' low ratings (i.e., feelings of "coldness") for gay men.⁵ As shown in Table 2, heterosexual women respondents' ratings of lesbians and gay men were almost identical, whereas heterosexual men's ratings of gay men were less favorable than their ratings of lesbians. Despite these differences, the two thermometer scores were highly correlated for heterosexual men ($r = .88$) as well as heterosexual women ($r = .95$).

Interpretation of the scores in Table 2 is facilitated by comparing them to ratings of other target groups included in the 1997 survey. In contrast to ratings for gay men and lesbians, most other thermometer scores were markedly higher. For example, mean ratings of various ethnic and racial groups (Whites, Blacks, Mexican-Americans, Puerto Ricans) were all greater than 60. Mean ratings of Democrats and Republicans were greater than 52. Only attitudes toward injecting drug users were more negative (mean ratings < 16). This pattern is consistent with feeling thermometer responses in the American National Election Studies (Sapiro et al., 1998) between 1984 and 1998. When compared to these other groups, the differences between ratings of gay men and lesbians appear fairly small.

Insert Table 3 about here

I also assessed personal comfort about gay men and lesbians. Each respondents was asked "In general, how comfortable do you feel around a man who is homosexual" and "In general, how comfortable do you feel around a woman who is a lesbian." The response distributions to the two items are presented in Table 3. For both items, the distributions differed significantly for male and female respondents.⁶ Overall, male respondents expressed less comfort than female respondents, mainly because of their feelings of discomfort around gay men. For example, only 25% of the men were "very comfortable" around gay men, compared to 46% of the women.

Comparing response distributions across the two items yielded significant differences for both women and men.⁷ Most men and women gave consistent responses. For example, those who were “very comfortable” around lesbians also were “very comfortable” around gay men. However, respondents who gave inconsistent responses tended to feel less comfortable around a homosexual person of their same sex. Of the women respondents, 36% were less comfortable around lesbians compared to gay men, whereas only 4% were less comfortable around gay men. Of the men respondents, 27% were less comfortable around gay men, whereas only 6% were less comfortable around lesbians. The patterns were similar for respondents who reported personally knowing lesbians or gay men (i.e., those who had actually experienced direct contact with gay people) and those who did not. In summary, women expressed more comfort overall, but both men and women were less comfortable around a homosexual person of their same sex.

The data reported so far permit some tentative conclusions about differences in the valence and extremity of attitudes toward lesbians versus attitudes toward gay men. It is clear that any discussion of attitude differences must separate heterosexual women’s attitudes from those of heterosexual men. Consistent with data from convenience samples, the national survey data indicate that heterosexual men’s attitudes differ significantly according to the gender of the attitude target. Their attitudes toward gay men are much more negative than their attitudes toward lesbians. Heterosexual women’s attitudes do not differ reliably according to target gender.

Whether the overall valence of attitudes toward lesbians and toward gay men can be characterized as positive or negative appears to depend both on the gender of the respondent and the specific question being asked. Overall, respondents described their affective response to both gay men and lesbians as colder than their reactions to various ethnic, racial, and political groups. Examination of responses to the individual ATL and ATG items revealed that clear majorities of women and men alike

regarded both male and female homosexuality as wrong and unnatural; a majority of men, but not women, expressed disgust at both lesbians and gay men. And although majorities of men and women stated that they were comfortable with both lesbians and gay men, a significant number were only “somewhat comfortable.” If that category is interpreted as indicating some degree of discomfort, then clear majorities of men and women alike expressed discomfort toward both gay men and lesbians. Such discomfort was more pronounced among heterosexual men, and was more evident when respondents were asked about homosexual persons of their same sex.

Thus, with some qualifications depending on the specific items, the data suggest the tentative conclusion that attitudes toward both lesbians and gay men are generally negative and highly correlated. To the extent that differences are observed between attitudes toward lesbians and toward gay men, they occur mainly among heterosexual men, who express more negative attitudes toward gay men than toward lesbians. As discussed in the next section, however, these patterns are affected by situational factors.

Attitude Dynamics

In addition to examining attitude valence and intensity, another approach to comparing heterosexuals’ attitudes toward lesbians and gay men is to examine the dynamic psychological processes that occur while a heterosexual person thinks about homosexuality. In my own research program, I have begun to address this question by examining context effects in survey responses. By context effects, I mean differences in response patterns that result from the order in which questions are asked in a structured interview (see generally Schwarz & Sudman, 1992). Although context effects in survey research were once regarded mainly as methodological artifacts, recent studies have used them to understand the cognitive processes underlying attitudes and the nature of attitudes in specific domains (Schwarz & Sudman, 1992).

My 1997 survey included two experimental manipulations whose results offer interesting insights into the dynamics of heterosexuals’

attitudes. Both manipulations involved item order. In the first experiment, one-half of respondents (randomly selected) received the lesbian feeling thermometer first, whereas the other half received the gay male feeling thermometer first. In the second experiment, which occurred later in the survey and independent of the feeling thermometer manipulation, one half of the sample received the ATL items first, and the other half received the ATG items first (Herek & Capitanio, 1999a).

For the ATG and ATL scales, the effects of the experimental manipulation can be seen by examining Table 1 in its entirety. The first two data columns (already discussed above) show the results when ATG items were presented first, whereas the last two columns show response patterns for the half of the sample that received the ATL items first. Men's ATL scores were significantly lower (less sexual prejudice) when the lesbian items were presented first than when the gay male items came first ($M_s = 7.52$ and 8.61 , respectively). By contrast, men's ATG scores, women's ATG scores, and women's ATL scores did not differ significantly by item order.⁸ Univariate ANOVAs (reported in Table 1) show that respondents' ATG and ATL scores were significantly different in all conditions. Given the large sample, however, it is more informative to examine the effect sizes (η^2) than the significance tests. As shown in Table 1, the effect sizes associated with the differences between men's ATG and ATL scores were substantial, especially when the ATL items were presented first. In the latter condition, $\eta^2 = .327$.

Order effects were readily apparent in responses to the individual ATL and ATG items. For example, 66% of men agreed that sex between women is wrong when the ATG items came first, compared to only 45% when the lesbian items came first, a difference of 21 points. For the disgust item, the difference was 18 points (54% agreed when ATG items came first, compared to 36% when ATL items came first). For the "natural" item, the difference was smaller but in the same direction (36% versus 31%). Despite these substantial differences, correlations between the ATL and ATG scales when the ATL items came first ($r = .88$ for

heterosexual women and $r = .73$ for heterosexual men) were comparable to when ATG items came first (already reported above).

Examining Table 2 in its entirety reveals a similar pattern for the feeling thermometers. As with Table 1, the first two data columns (already discussed above) include respondents who received the gay male thermometer first. Respondents who received the lesbian thermometer first are described in the last two columns. Men's feelings toward lesbians were significantly warmer when the lesbian thermometer was presented first ($M = 41.3$) than when it followed the gay male thermometer ($M = 34.3$). A comparable, though less pronounced, effect was observed for the gay male thermometers ($M_s = 36.5$ and 31.2).⁹ As with the ATG and ATL, the two thermometers remained highly correlated when lesbians were rated first: $r = .98$ (heterosexual women) and $.88$ (heterosexual men).

Discussion

In summary, the data suggest that heterosexuals' attitudes toward lesbians differ from their attitudes toward gay men in overall intensity, but probably not in valence. The difference in intensity results mainly from the fact that heterosexual men's attitudes toward gay men are consistently more hostile than their attitudes toward lesbians or heterosexual women's attitudes toward homosexuals of either gender. This finding replicates results obtained in previous research with convenience samples (Kite & Whitley, 1996).

In addition, heterosexual men's attitudes – especially toward lesbians – appear to be highly susceptible to contextual cues. Before interpreting this finding, it is appropriate to briefly review current thinking about the substantive meaning of survey context effects. Psychologically-oriented survey researchers conceive of attitudes as long-term memory structures that are activated when an attitude object is encountered or when people are questioned about their opinions (Tourangeau & Rasinski, 1988). Once a particular attitude is activated, that activation spreads to other, linked attitudes within the respondent's cognitive

network. Tourangeau (1992) has suggested that being asked a series of questions (e.g., about gay men) may make certain feelings, beliefs, images, and evaluations from long-term memory more accessible, which can affect answers to subsequent questions (e.g., about lesbians).

Considered within this framework, the results presented here suggest that questions about gay men activate different associative networks from those activated by questions about lesbians. At least for heterosexual males, answering questions about gay men appears to stimulate retrieval of negative thoughts and feelings from memory, which then carry over to subsequent responses to items about lesbians. Consequently, when heterosexual men were asked questions first about gay men and then about lesbians, their attitudes toward both groups were considerably more negative than when the lesbian items came first. For heterosexual men who received the item sets in the reverse order (i.e., lesbian items first), the difference in attitudes toward lesbians was especially remarkable. For heterosexual women, item order had minimal effects.

A plausible interpretation of this pattern is suggested by the earlier discussion of sexual prejudice as both a minority group attitude and an expression of gender and sexual identity. To the extent that considerations of one's own sexuality or gender are activated by survey questions about homosexuality, it follows that questions about gay men should be expected to evoke a different set of beliefs and feelings than do questions about lesbians. For many heterosexual men, being asked about their attitudes toward gay men probably activates feelings and beliefs associated with a heterosexual masculine identity and its imperative to prove oneself by rejecting gay men. Once this schema is activated, subsequent items about lesbians are subsumed into it. Presenting items about lesbians first, however, may activate a quite different schema – perhaps one having to do with religious or political values, or fascination with lesbians as objects of sexual desire (Kite & Whitley, 1998; Louderback & Whitley, 1997). Consequently, the attitudes expressed are considerably less

negative and less passionate because they are not based on the felt imperative to assert or prove one's heterosexual masculinity. By contrast, rejection of lesbians is less relevant to most heterosexual women's self-image (although the fact that some women felt less comfortable around lesbians than gay men suggests that gender and sexual identity are probably relevant in some cases). Consequently, their attitudes toward gay men and lesbians alike probably can be better understood as minority group attitudes.

Insert Figure 1 about here

It is difficult to evaluate this interpretation by examining only attitudes toward lesbians and gay men. If heterosexual men's and women's attitudes toward another, comparable group were available, the patterns might become clearer. Fortunately, a relevant comparison is available from a follow-up national survey that I conducted in 1999, which included feeling thermometers for "bisexual men" and "bisexual women" as well as for lesbians and gay men.¹⁰ If heterosexual men consistently organize their attitudes about sexual orientation more in terms of their personal gender schema than is the case for heterosexual women, we might expect their attitudes toward bisexual men and women to show a gender difference similar to their attitudes toward gay men and lesbians. Any differences in women's attitudes, by contrast, would be expected to occur between sexual orientation groups rather than between genders.

As shown in Figure 1, such a pattern is indeed evident in the 1999 data. Heterosexual men expressed colder feelings (lower thermometer ratings) for male targets than female targets, regardless of whether the thermometer referred to homosexuals or bisexuals. By contrast, heterosexual women expressed similar levels of warmth within sexual orientation groups but their attitudes toward bisexuals were colder than their attitudes toward homosexuals.

Do heterosexuals' attitudes toward lesbians

and gay men differ qualitatively as well as quantitatively? At first glance, the data on context effects suggest an affirmative answer to this question. Heterosexual men apparently organize their attitudes in terms of gender and sexual identity, which results in different ways of thinking about lesbians and about gay men. Heterosexual women, by contrast, appear to organize their attitudes more in terms of a minority group paradigm which does not differentiate gay men so sharply from lesbians. However, the magnitude of these differences should not be overstated. Moreover, the fact that attitudes toward lesbians and toward gay men are highly correlated (regardless of the order in which items are presented) indicates that such attitudes are closely linked in the minds of most respondents, male and female alike. In all likelihood, most heterosexual men and women employ both paradigms to some extent when thinking about gay men and lesbians. Whether or not an individual relies more on one paradigm than the other will depend on a variety of factors, including how her or his own gender and sexual identity are defined relative to homosexuality. It may be useful in future research to explore the possibility that heterosexual men tend to give somewhat greater emphasis to issues of gender and sexual identity, especially in their evaluations of gay men, whereas heterosexual women tend to frame their attitudes mainly in terms of a minority group schema.

The need for empirical and conceptual differentiation of heterosexuals' attitudes toward lesbians and attitudes toward gay men should now be clear. Only by carefully studying attitudes toward homosexual people of each gender will we be able to discover their discontinuities as well as their similarities. A gender-differentiated program of research offers the promise of obtaining important insights into the nature of sexual prejudice

References

Adam, B. D. (1987). *The rise of a gay and lesbian movement*. Boston: Twayne Publishers.

Altman, D. (1971). *Homosexual: Oppression and liberation*. New York: Outerbridge & Dienstfrey.

Epstein, S. (1999). Gay and lesbian movements in the United States: Dilemmas of identity, diversity, and political strategy. In B.D. Adam, J. Duyvendak, & A. Krouwel (Eds.), *The global emergence of gay and lesbian politics* (pp. 30-90). Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Haaga, D. (1991). "Homophobia"? *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality*, 6, 171-174.

Herek, G. M. (1984). Beyond "homophobia": A social psychological perspective on attitudes toward lesbians and gay men. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 10(1/2), 1-21.

Herek, G. M. (1986). On heterosexual masculinity: Some psychical consequences of the social construction of gender and sexuality. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 29, 563-577.

Herek, G. M. (1987). Can functions be measured? A new perspective on the functional approach to attitudes. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 50, 285-303.

Herek, G. M. (1988). Heterosexuals' attitudes toward lesbians and gay men: Correlates and gender differences. *Journal of Sex Research*, 25, 451-477.

Herek, G. M. (1991). Stigma, prejudice, and violence against lesbians and gay men. In J. C. Gonsiorek, & J. D. Weinrich (Eds.), *Homosexuality: Research implications for public policy* (pp. 60-80). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Herek, G. M. (1992). Psychological heterosexism and anti-gay violence: The social psychology of bigotry and bashing. In G.M. Herek & K.T. Berrill (Eds.), *Hate crimes: Confronting violence against lesbians and gay men* (pp. 149-169). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Herek, G. M. (1994). Assessing attitudes toward lesbians and gay men: A review of empirical research with the ATLG scale. In B. Greene, & G. M. Herek (Eds.), *Lesbian and gay psychology* (pp. 206-228). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Herek, G. M. (2000). The psychology of sexual prejudice. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 9, 19-22.

Herek, G. M., & Capitanio, J. P. (1995). Black heterosexuals' attitudes toward lesbians and gay men in the United States. *Journal of Sex Research*, 32, 95-105.

Herek, G. M., & Capitanio, J. P. (1996). "Some of my best friends": Intergroup contact, concealable stigma, and heterosexuals' attitudes toward gay men and lesbians. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 22, 412-424.

Herek, G. M., & Capitanio, J. P. (1999a). Sex

differences in how heterosexuals think about lesbians and gay men: Evidence from survey context effects. *Journal of Sex Research*, 36.

Herek, G. M., & Capitanio, J. P. (1999b). AIDS stigma and sexual prejudice. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 42, 1126-1143.

Kimmel, M. S. (1997). Masculinity as homophobia: Fear, shame and silence in the construction of gender identity. In M.M. Gergen & S.N. Davis (Eds.), *Toward a new psychology of gender* (pp. 223-242). New York: Routledge.

Kinsey, A. C., Pomeroy, W. B., & Martin, C. E. (1948). *Sexual behavior in the human male*. Philadelphia, PA: W. B. Saunders.

Kite, M. E. (1984). Sex differences in attitudes toward homosexuals: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 10(1-2), 69-81.

Kite, M. E., & Deaux, K. (1986). Attitudes toward homosexuality: Assessment and behavioral consequences. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 7, 137-162.

Kite, M. E., & Whitley, B. E., Jr. (1996). Sex differences in attitudes toward homosexual persons, behaviors, and civil rights: A meta-analysis. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 22, 336-353.

Kite, M. E., & Whitley, B. E., Jr. (1998). Do heterosexual women and men differ in their attitudes toward homosexuality? A conceptual and methodological analysis. In G. M. Herek (Ed.), *Stigma and sexual orientation* (pp. 39-61). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Louderback, L. A., & Whitley, B. E., Jr. (1997). Perceived erotic value of homosexuality and sex-role attitudes as mediators of sex differences in heterosexual college students' attitudes toward lesbians and gay men. *Journal of Sex Research*, 34, 175-182.

Minton, H. L. (1986). Femininity in men and masculinity in women: American psychiatry and psychology portray homosexuality in the 1930's. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 13(1), 1-21.

Rich, A. (1980). Compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian existence. *Signs*, 5, 631-660.

Sapiro, V., Rosenstone, S. J., Miller, W. E., & the National Election Studies. (1998). *American National Election Studies, 1948-1997 (CD-ROM)*. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (producer and distributor).

Schwarz, N. and Sudman, S. (Eds.).(1992). *Context effects in social and psychological research*.

New York: Springer-Verlag.

Sherrill, K., & Yang, A. (2000). From outlaws to in-laws: Anti-gay attitudes thaw. *Public Perspective*, 11(1), 20-23.

Terry, J. (1999). *An American obsession: Science, medicine, and homosexuality in modern society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Tourangeau, R. (1992). Context effects on responses to attitude questions: Attitudes as memory structures. In N. Schwarz & S. Sudman (Eds.), *Context effects in social and psychological research* (pp. 35-47). New York: Springer-Verlag.

Tourangeau, R., & Rasinski, K. A. (1988). Cognitive processes underlying context effects in attitude measurement. *Psychological Bulletin*, 103, 299-314.

Weinberg, G. (1972). *Society and the healthy homosexual*. New York: St. Martin's.

Yang, A. S. (1997). Trends: Attitudes toward homosexuality. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 61, 477-507.

Notes

¹ One item, administered in two Los Angeles Times polls, asked separately about respondents' feeling uncomfortable around homosexual men and lesbian women. Another item, used in three Roper surveys, asked male respondents about their reaction to a son having a homosexual relationship, and female respondents their reactions to a daughter having a lesbian relationship.

² In addition to a general cross-sectional sample, the study included an oversample of Black adults. The present analyses are limited to the cross-sectional sample. Comparisons of Black and White respondents, using the oversample, are reported elsewhere (Herek & Capitanio, 1999a).

³ The data excluded respondents who self-identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual, or who did not answer a question about their sexual orientation.

⁴ A repeated measures ANOVA for respondents in the first two columns of Table 1 yielded significant main effects for respondent sex, $F(1, 568) = 11.93$ ($p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .021$), and scale version (ATG or ATL), $F(1, 568) = 6.07$ ($p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .011$). For the

interaction term, $F(1, 568) = 54.19, p < .001, \eta^2 = .087$.

⁵ A repeated measures ANOVA for respondents in the first two columns of Table 2 yielded significant main effects for respondent sex, $F(1, 593) = 23.64 (p < .001, \eta^2 = .038)$, and thermometer target (gay men or lesbians), $F(1, 593) = 9.57 (p < .01, \eta^2 = .016)$. For the interaction term, $F(1, 593) = 20.40, p < .001, \eta^2 = .033$.

⁶ For comfort with gay men, $\chi^2(3, n = 1153) = 76.70, p < .001$. For comfort with lesbians, $\chi^2(3, n = 1152) = 17.70, p < .001$.

⁷ For women, $\chi^2(9, n = 635) = 481.05$. For men $\chi^2(9, n = 515) = 507.62$ (both $ps < .001$).

⁸ The data were subjected to a repeated measures MANOVA with ATL and ATG scores as the within-subjects factor and item order and respondent sex as between-subjects factors. The analysis yielded a significant multivariate effect for scale (ATL versus ATG), Wilks' $\Lambda = .914, F(1, 1118) = 105.17, p < .001, \eta^2 = .086$. There were no main effects for respondent sex or item order. However, all of the two-way interactions were significant: for Scale \times Respondent Sex, $\Lambda = .907, F(1, 1118) = 115.24, p < .001, \eta^2 = .093$; Respondent Sex \times Order, $F(1, 1118) = 9.37, p < .01, \eta^2 = .008$; and Scale \times Order, $\Lambda = .959, F(1, 1118) = 47.50, p < .001, \eta^2 = .041$. The three-way interaction term was not significant. Follow-up repeated measures ANOVAs were conducted within each gender \times order group; the results are reported in Table 1.

⁹ MANOVA revealed significant main effects for thermometer, Wilks' $\Lambda = .962, F(1, 1150) = 44.87, p < .001, \eta^2 = .038$, and respondent sex, $F(1, 1150) = 11.58, p < .001, \eta^2 = .01$, but not for thermometer order. These effects were qualified by the significant two-way interactions for Thermometer \times Order, $\Lambda = .995, F(1, 1150) = 5.93, p < .05, \eta^2 = .005$; Thermometer \times Respondent Sex, $\Lambda = .963, F(1, 1150) = 43.76, p < .001, \eta^2 = .037$; and Order \times Respondent Sex, $F(1, 1150) = 9.07, p < .01, \eta^2 = .008$. The three-way interaction term was not significant. Follow-up repeated measures ANOVAs were conducted within each gender \times order group; the results for males are reported in Table 2 (females' rating did not differ significantly by gender of

thermometer target).

¹⁰ The 1999 survey included reinterviews with roughly half of the respondents to the 1997 study as well as a new RDD sample of 669 US adults. Interviews were conducted by the Survey Research Center at the University of California at Berkeley, using the same sampling and interview procedures as in the 1997 survey. The two subsamples (follow-up and new RDD) did not differ in their responses to the feeling thermometers shown in Figure 1 and were combined for the analyses reported here.

Table 1
Mean ATL and ATG Scores By Respondent Sex And Item Order

Scale	ATG First		ATL First	
	Women ^a (<i>n</i> = 324)	Men ^b (<i>n</i> = 246)	Women ^c (<i>n</i> = 297)	Men ^d (<i>n</i> = 255)
ATL	8.33 (2.96)	8.61 (2.65)	8.29 (2.77)	7.52 (2.79)
ATG	8.00 (2.82)	9.28 (2.58)	8.57 (2.80)	8.93 (2.78)

Note. Higher scores indicate higher levels of sexual prejudice. Standard deviations are reported in parentheses. ATL = Attitudes Toward Lesbians Scale. ATG = Attitudes Toward Gay Men Scale. Superscripts refer to results of repeated measures ANOVAs for entries within columns, comparing ATG and ATL scores within gender and order condition; in all cases, ATL and ATG scores were significantly different.

^a $F(1, 323) = 16.60, p < .001, \eta^2 = .049$

^b $F(1, 245) = 34.96, p < .001, \eta^2 = .125$

^c $F(1, 296) = 13.16, p < .001, \eta^2 = .043$

^d $F(1, 254) = 123.44, p < .001, \eta^2 = .327$

Table 2
Mean Feeling Thermometer Ratings for Lesbians and Gay Men by Item Order

Thermometer Target	Gay Men First		Lesbians First	
	Women (<i>n</i> = 341)	Men (<i>n</i> = 254) ^a	Women (<i>n</i> = 300)	Men (<i>n</i> = 259) ^b
Lesbians	42.3 (26.0)	34.3 (23.5)	39.8 (28.6)	41.3 (26.4)
Gay Men	42.9 (26.3)	31.2 (23.3)	39.2 (28.9)	36.5 (27.4)

Note. Higher scores indicate more positive (“warmer”) feelings toward target. Standard deviations are reported in parentheses. Superscripts refer to results of repeated measures ANOVAs comparing men respondents’ gay male and lesbian thermometer scores within order condition; thermometer scores for women respondents were not significantly different.

^a $F(1, 253) = 18.13, p < .001, \eta^2 = .067$

^b $F(1, 258) = 32.09, p < .001, \eta^2 = .111$

Table 3
Levels of Comfort With Gay Men and Lesbians By Respondent Sex

	Respondent Sex	
	Women (<i>n</i> = 637)	Men (<i>n</i> = 515)
<hr/>		
Very comfortable		
Lesbians	29%	33%
Gay Men	46%	25%
Somewhat comfortable		
Lesbians	30%	35%
Gay Men	31%	31%
Somewhat uncomfortable		
Lesbians	25%	23%
Gay Men	14%	27%
Very uncomfortable		
Lesbians	17%	9%
Gay Men	8%	17%
<hr/>		

Note. Percentages exclude “don’t know” and nonresponse (< 2% of cases).

Figure Caption

Figure 1. Feeling Thermometer Ratings of Homosexual and Bisexual Men and Women According To Respondent Gender (1999 National Telephone Survey).