

# Stigma, Prejudice, and Violence Against Lesbians and Gay Men

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Institutional and personal hostility toward lesbians and gay men is a fact of life in the United States today. At the cultural level, homosexuality remains stigmatized through institutional policies. Statutes prohibiting antigay discrimination in employment, housing, and services are in force in only two states (Wisconsin and Massachusetts), the District of Columbia, and a few dozen municipalities and local jurisdictions (e.g., San Francisco, New York, Chicago). Lesbian and gay military personnel are subject to discharge if their sexual orientation is discovered, no matter how exemplary their service records. Gay civilians routinely are denied government security clearances, or are subjected to more intensive investigation than are heterosexual applicants. Lesbian and gay relationships generally are not legally recognized and, in 24 states and the District of Columbia, the partners in same-sex relationships are forbidden by law from private sexual contact (e.g., Herek, 1989, 1990a; Melton, 1989; Rivera, this volume).

Many individual heterosexuals' attitudes toward gay men and women are consistent with this institutional hostility. Roughly two-thirds of Americans<sup>1</sup> condemn homosexuality or homosexual behavior as morally wrong or a sin (e.g., polls by ABC, 8/87; *Los Angeles Times*, 8/87; Roper, 9/85); this pattern appears not to have changed significantly from the late 1970s (e.g., polls by Yankelovich, 3/78; Gallup,

11/78).<sup>2</sup> According to Gallup polls (Colasanto, 1989), only a plurality of Americans feel that homosexual relations between consenting adults should be legal (47% versus 36% who say they should not be legal).

Many heterosexual Americans also reject gay people at the personal level. In 1987, a Roper poll found that 25% of the respondents to a national survey would strongly object to working around people who are homosexual, and another 27% would prefer not to do so; only 45% "wouldn't mind." In a 1985 *Los Angeles Times* poll, 50% of respondents reported that they did *not* feel uncomfortable around homosexual men and women, while 35% reported discomfort around gay men or lesbians. This was a change from a 1983 poll, in which 40% reported not feeling discomfort, and 38% reported some discomfort.

Negative attitudes often are expressed behaviorally. Of 113 lesbians and 287 gay men in a national telephone survey, for example, 5% of the men and 10% of the women reported having been physically abused or assaulted in the previous year because they were gay. Nearly half (47%) reported experiencing some form of discrimination (job, housing, health care, or

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<sup>1</sup> Following popular usage, the word "American" is used in this chapter to describe residents of the United States of America.

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<sup>2</sup> Much of the national survey data described in this chapter were obtained through the Roper Center, University of Connecticut at Storrs. To assist the reader in distinguishing Roper Center data from data obtained through published reports, I have italicized the names of the polling organizations for the former. I am grateful to Professor Bliss Siman of Baruch College, City University of New York, for her assistance in securing these data.

social) at some time in their life based on their sexual orientation (“Results of poll,” 1989).<sup>3</sup> Other research similarly has found that significant numbers of gay men and lesbians have been the targets of verbal abuse, discrimination, or physical assault because of their sexual orientation (Berrill, 1990; Herek, 1989; Levine, 1979a; Levine & Leonard, 1984; Paul, 1982).

Despite widespread antipathy toward gay Americans, however, national surveys during the last two decades indicate a growing willingness to grant basic civil rights to gay people: Americans are increasingly reluctant to condone discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation (e.g., Colasanto, 1989; McCloskey & Brill, 1983; Schneider & Lewis, 1984; see Rayside & Bowler, 1988, for evidence of a similar trend in Canada). The proportion of American adults surveyed by the Gallup organization who say that homosexual men and women should have equal rights in terms of job opportunities increased from 56% in 1977 to 59% in 1982, and to 71% in 1989; the proportion opposing such rights declined from 33% to 28% to 18%, respectively (Colasanto, 1989). Similarly, *Roper* surveys found that the proportion of Americans agreeing that “homosexuals should be guaranteed equal treatment under the law in jobs and housing” rose from 60% in 1977 to 66% in 1985, while the proportion supporting legalized discrimination declined from 28% to 22%. When asked about specific occupations, respondents sometimes are more willing to discriminate but still show a steady trend toward supporting gay rights. In Gallup polls

(Colasanto, 1989), the proportion stating that gay people should be hired as doctors increased from 44% in 1977 to 56% in 1989; similar increases were observed for salespersons (from 68% to 79%), members of the armed forces (51% to 60%), clergy (36% to 44%), and elementary school teachers (27% to 42%).

Data collected by the *National Opinion Research Center (NORC)*, show increasing support for free speech rights for gay Americans during the last two decades. When asked in 1973 whether a person who “admits he is a homosexual” should be able to teach in a college or university, 47% would have allowed him to teach whereas 48% would not, a virtual tie. By 1980, the balance had shifted in favor of allowing him to teach, 55% to 42%. By 1988, the gap had widened to 57% to 39%. Similarly, the proportion who would allow the hypothetical homosexual man to make a speech in their community increased from 61% in 1973 to 66% in 1980 to 70% in 1988; the proportion who would *not* allow him to speak decreased in those years from 35% to 31% to 26%, respectively. Asked whether a book in favor of homosexuality, written by the same man, should be removed from the local public library, the proportion responding affirmatively dropped from 44% (1973) to 40% (1980) to 36% (1988).

In summary, although they show increasing willingness to extend basic civil liberties to gay men and lesbians, most heterosexual Americans continue to condemn homosexuality morally and to reject or feel uncomfortable about gay people personally. The present chapter uses social science theory and empirical research to describe and explain these negative attitudes, with special emphasis on research findings relevant to policymakers. The chapter begins with a discussion of gay people as a stigmatized minority group. Next, social psychological data on antigay prejudice are reviewed, and the characteristics shared by antigay attitudes and stereotypes on the one hand, and those directed at other minorities on the other are discussed. Next, consequences of prejudice are described. Finally, after a brief discussion of the linkage between antigay attitudes and public reactions to

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<sup>3</sup> In March-April of 1989, the San Francisco Examiner commissioned Teichner Associates to conduct telephone interviews with a gay and lesbian national sample ( $n = 400$ ) as well as a sample of gay residents of the San Francisco Bay Area ( $n = 400$ ). Approximately 27,000 calls were made to obtain 800 responses; 6.2% of the national respondents and 10% of the Bay Area respondents identified themselves as lesbian, gay, or bisexual to the interviewer (Hatfield, 1989). Although the sample is biased by the willingness of respondents to identify themselves as gay to a telephone interviewer, the poll represents the first published study of its kind in the United States.

AIDS, suggestions are offered for eradicating antigay prejudice.<sup>4</sup>

At the outset, a note about terminology is necessary. Hostility toward gay people has been labeled variously as *homoerotophobia* (Churchill, 1968), *heterosexism* (Morin & Garfinkle, 1978), *homosexphobia* (Levitt & Klassen, 1974), *homosexism* (Lehne, 1976), *homonegativism* (Hudson & Ricketts, 1980), *anti-homosexualism* (Hacker, 1971) and *antihomosexuality* (Klassen, Williams, & Levitt, 1989). The most widely used summary label for these attitudes is *homophobia* (Smith, 1971; Weinberg, 1972). Aside from its linguistic awkwardness (its literal meaning is “fear of sameness”), the term “homophobia” reflects at least three assumptions: That antigay prejudice is primarily a fear response; that it is irrational and dysfunctional for individuals who manifest it; and that it is primarily an individual aberration rather than a reflection of cultural values. Empirical data do not support these assumptions (Fyfe, 1983; Herek, 1986c; Nungesser, 1983). The present chapter, therefore, uses social psychological terminology to describe hostility toward gay people. Such hostility at the cultural level is labeled *stigma* (e.g., Goffman, 1963). Individual intolerance is considered here to be a particular *attitude*, defined as an evaluation of persons, issues, or objects on such dimensions as good-bad, like-dislike, or favorable-unfavorable (e.g., McGuire, 1985). *Prejudice* and *bigotry* here refer to a strongly negative or hostile attitude toward a social group or its individual members (e.g., Allport, 1954; Stephan, 1985). For lack of better terms, *tolerance* and *acceptance* are used to describe the opposite of prejudice, i.e., positive or favorable attitudes.

### **Gay People, Minority Groups and Prejudice**

#### ***Gay People as a Minority Group***

Although the notion that gay people

comprise a minority group comparable to racial, ethnic, and religious minorities was articulated nearly 40 years ago (Cory, 1951), it only recently has begun to enjoy a degree of acceptance in American society (see also Kameny, 1971). Lesbians and gay men differ from other minorities in important respects (Paul, 1982). Nevertheless, they can reasonably be viewed as a minority group because they manifest four important characteristics by which minority groups are defined (e.g., Seeman, 1981; Tajfel, 1981). First, gay people comprise a subordinate segment within a larger complex state society. Second, they manifest characteristics that are held in low esteem by the dominant segments of society (support for these two points can be found throughout the present volume, as well as in Paul et al., 1982). Third, they are self-consciously bound together as a community by virtue of these characteristics (e.g., Altman, 1982; D’Emilio, 1983; Levine, 1979b).<sup>5</sup>

Finally, they receive differential treatment based upon these characteristics, ranging from discrimination (Gross, Aurand, & Addressa, 1988; Levine, 1979a; Levine & Leonard, 1984; “Results of poll,” 1989; Rivera, this volume) to assault and victimization (Herek, 1989; Herek & Berrill, 1990; Paul, 1982; “Results of poll,” 1989). Although the existence of such differential treatment usually is not disputed, its justification often is (Hacker, 1971). Public figures generally are unwilling to endorse outright violence against gay people, although Senator Jesse Helms [R-NC] and other elected officials attempted to block passage of the Hate Crimes Statistics Act because it included antigay violence among the “hate crimes” to be monitored by law enforcement personnel (Cohen, 1989). Discrimination in employment, housing, and services, in contrast, frequently is justified on the basis of beliefs that gay people possess various undesirable characteristics, e.g., that they are mentally ill and dangerous to

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<sup>4</sup> This chapter is not intended to be a complete literature review; for additional references, see Dynes (1987), Herek (1984a), Morin & Garfinkle (1978), Plummer (1975), and Warren (1980).

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<sup>5</sup> Not all people who are homosexual necessarily identify with the gay community or participate in it. The same can be said for African Americans, Jews, and other minority groups.

children. These unfounded stereotypes are discussed later in this chapter.

A principal justification for discrimination and hostility toward gay people appeals to religious morality. Because homosexuality is condemned by several major religions, it is argued, laws prohibiting discrimination would require heterosexual individuals to violate their personal moral standards. In this context, gay people can be viewed as a religious minority group: Although they do not manifest a unified religious ideology, they often are persecuted on the basis of the dominant majority's religious beliefs (Herek, 1990a; Paul, 1982). Opposition to civil rights for gay people is perceived by some Americans as a litmus test of religious commitment (the correlation between religiosity and antigay prejudice is well documented; see Bierly, 1985; Gentry, 1987; Herek, 1984a, 1987a; Klassen et al., 1989; Maret, 1984; Schneider & Lewis, 1984). Many Roman Catholics, fundamentalist Christians, and orthodox Jews have used religious teachings to justify their active opposition to enactment of statutes or policies designed to protect gay people from discrimination (for statements of the argument, see Bryant, 1977; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1986; LaHaye, 1978; for descriptions of antigay activism by Church officials, see Chapter 7 of Rueda, 1982). Although moralistic arguments are no longer widely accepted to excuse racial or religious intolerance, they still carry sufficient weight when applied to homosexuality that religious institutions often are exempted from anti-discrimination statutes, as in the 1989 Massachusetts law. Indeed, Supreme Court Justices White and Burger both cited Judeo-Christian teachings in their written opinions upholding the constitutionality of state sodomy statutes (*Bowers v. Hardwick*, 1986).

Finally, gay people can be viewed also as members of a political minority. The relatively recent flourishing of visible gay communities is largely a result of political and legal struggles against prejudice and discrimination that have spanned four decades (Adam, 1987; Berube, 1990; D'Emilio, 1983). These communities

constitute a political force for gay concerns, especially in cities like San Francisco (Altman, 1982; Shilts, 1982). Acknowledging one's membership in the community through coming out to others can itself be defined as a political act (Kitzinger, 1987) or can be motivated by the desire to challenge antigay policies or attitudes (Brown, 1976; Hippler, 1989). The political minority status of gay people was recognized by the California Supreme Court in 1979 (*Gay Law Students Association v. Pacific Telephone and Telegraph*). Noting that the civil rights struggle of the gay community "must be recognized as political activity" (p. 32) and that publicly acknowledging one's own homosexual orientation is an important aspect of this struggle, the Court ruled that discrimination against openly gay individuals constitutes illegal discrimination on the basis of political activity.

### **The Social Psychology of Antigay Prejudice**

Although each form of bigotry has its own unique history and content, antigay prejudice manifests the same general psychological structure and dynamics as racism, anti-semitism, and other prejudices against stigmatized groups. Each can be understood by the same social scientific theories and measured by the same methodologies (e.g., Bierly, 1985; Gergen & Gergen, 1981; Herek, 1984a, 1987b, 1988).

#### ***Correlates of Antigay Prejudice***

Empirical research has demonstrated that heterosexuals' attitudes toward gay people consistently are correlated with various psychological, social, and demographic variables. In contrast to heterosexuals with favorable attitudes toward gay people, those with negative attitudes are 1) more likely to express traditional, restrictive attitudes about gender-roles; 2) less likely to report having themselves engaged in homosexual behaviors or to self-identify as lesbian or gay; 3) more likely to perceive their peers as manifesting negative attitudes; 4) less likely to have had personal contact with gay men or lesbians; 5) likely to be older and less well-educated; 6) more likely to have resided in areas where negative attitudes represent the norm (e.g., rural areas; the

Midwestern and Southern United States); and 7) more likely to be strongly religious and to subscribe to a conservative religious ideology (Herek, 1984a).

Additionally, heterosexual males tend to manifest higher levels of prejudice than do heterosexual females, especially toward gay men (Kite, 1984; Herek, 1984a, 1988). This sex difference may result from the strong linkage of masculinity with heterosexuality in American culture, which creates considerable pressures (both social and psychological) for males to affirm their masculinity through rejection of that which is not culturally defined as masculine (male homosexuality) and that which is perceived as negating the importance of males (lesbianism). Because heterosexual women are less likely to perceive rejection of homosexuality as integral to their own gender identity, they may experience fewer pressures to be prejudiced and consequently have more opportunities for personal contact with gay people which, in turn, tends to foster positive attitudes (Herek, 1986b, 1987b, 1988).

Some individuals display a personality pattern of general intolerance for stigmatized groups, often subsumed under the label of *authoritarianism* (e.g., Adorno et al., 1950; Altemeyer, 1988). A significant correlation consistently has been observed between antigay attitudes and high scores on measures of authoritarianism (Altemeyer, 1988; Herek, 1988; Hood, 1973; Karr, 1978; Larsen et al., 1980; MacDonald and Games, 1974; Smith, 1971; Sobel, 1976). Given this propensity for some individuals to express intolerant attitudes toward a variety of out-groups, it is not surprising that antigay prejudice has been found to correlate with racism (Bierly, 1985; Henley & Pincus, 1978).<sup>6</sup> Herek (1987a) demonstrated that this

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<sup>6</sup> Verbal reports of racial attitudes (and correlation coefficients based on those reports) are affected considerably by social norms discouraging expressions of racism (Crosby, Bromley, & Saxe, 1980). In the author's personal research experience, such norms do not appear to operate to a significant degree with verbal expressions of anti-gay prejudice, especially with nonstudent samples.

correlation is affected by religious orientation. White heterosexual college students tended to score high on both anti-Black racism and antigay prejudice if their religious beliefs were extrinsically motivated (i.e., if their religion functioned primarily as a means for fitting in with a social group). In contrast, those with intrinsically-motivated religious beliefs (i.e., beliefs that provide an overarching framework by which all life is understood) tended to score low on racism and high on antigay attitudes. Herek (1987a) explained this pattern as reflecting the norms and values associated with each orientation: Intrinsic conformed to religious ideals (which condemn racism but not antigay prejudice), while Extrinsic conformed to community norms (which fostered both racism and antigay prejudice).

### ***Stereotypes and Cultural Ideologies***

Strongly correlated with negative attitudes toward lesbians and gay men is acceptance of negative stereotypes--exaggerated and fixed beliefs--about them (e.g., Allport, 1954). Because stereotypes and prejudice both involve reactions to individuals in terms of their group membership, and because beliefs about the characteristics of a group often include an evaluative component, the two concepts often are equated (Ashmore & DelBoca, 1981). Some researchers, however, have found it useful to distinguish between them and have begun to study the cognitive processes through which stereotyping occurs (e.g., Brewer & Kramer, 1985). Insights from this approach are described in the next section.

*Stereotyping: Belief creates reality.* The continually changing world constantly bombards us with an overwhelming amount of sensory stimulation. Interpreting and responding to each separate item of information is beyond human mental capabilities. Yet individual survival requires that we be able to detect important occurrences in the environment, make reasonably accurate predictions about how they will affect us, and behave accordingly. Consequently, we use a variety of strategies for judging the importance of information and for integrating it with our past experiences. These

strategies enable us to perceive the world as reasonably stable, fairly predictable, and generally manageable (e.g., Snyder, 1981).

One such strategy is categorization, a mental process whereby we associate or “clump” different objects (including people) according to some characteristic that they all share. Once an object is grouped with others, we have available a considerable amount of information about it by simply recalling the defining features of the category. For example, trying to remember the individual characteristics of 25 different objects in a room is impossible for most people; but if 20 of those objects fit the category of “chair” and the remaining five fit the category of “table,” the memory task suddenly becomes fairly simple.

When categorization is applied to people, the consequence often is a stereotype (e.g., Hamilton, 1981). Stereotypes result when we: 1) categorize people into groups on the basis of some characteristic; 2) attribute additional characteristics to that category; 3) then attribute those other characteristics individually to all of the group’s members (e.g., Snyder, 1981). Whereas a categorization is based on features that actually define the group (e.g., the belief that all gay people have a primary sexual or romantic attraction to others of their own sex), a stereotype involves characteristics that are unrelated to the criteria for group membership (e.g., the belief that all gay men are effeminate or that all lesbians hate men). Heterosexuals often notice only those characteristics that are congruent with their stereotypes about gay people (*selective perception*), fail to recall incongruent characteristics retrospectively (*selective recall*), and use the content of stereotypes as the basis for *illusory correlations*. Each of these phenomena is discussed here briefly.

People often perceive the world selectively, attending to information that supports their stereotypes and ignoring information that contradicts them. This process of selective perception influences heterosexuals’ responses to gay men and lesbians. For example, Alan Gross and his colleagues (Gross, Green, Storck,

& Vanyur, 1980) found that students at their university believed gay men generally to be theatrical, gentle, and liberated, whereas heterosexual men were thought to be more aggressive, dominant, competitive, strong, and stable; the same students believed lesbians generally to be dominant, direct, forceful, strong, liberated, and nonconforming, whereas heterosexual women were perceived as more likely to be conservative and stable. The researchers asked a separate sample of students to describe a man or woman in terms of these characteristics after watching a brief videotaped interview with her or him. Students who were told that the person was gay rated her or him higher on “gay traits” and lower on “heterosexual traits” than those who received no information about the interviewee’s sexual orientation. Using only a gay male stimulus person, Gurwitz and Marcus (1978) found the same effect at a different university

Stereotypical beliefs not only distort perceptions of current interactions; they also can affect an individual’s memory for past events. Snyder and Uranowitz (1978), for example, provided undergraduates with a 750-word case study of the life history of a woman named “Betty K.” After reading the file, some students were told that Betty later became involved in a lesbian relationship and went on to a satisfying career as a physician living with her female lover. Other students learned that Betty married and went on to a satisfying career as a physician living with her (male) husband. On subsequent factual questions, students tended to remember events that fit with their subsequent knowledge about Betty’s sexual orientation. Those who learned that Betty became a lesbian tended to remember that she did not have a steady boyfriend in high school, for example, whereas students who learned that she married heterosexually recalled that she dated boys (see also Snyder, 1981).

Heterosexuals’ observations of gay people as a group are likely to be distorted by illusory correlations, i.e., the erroneous perception that a particular characteristic occurs with disproportionate frequency among gay men and

lesbians. In their classic studies, Chapman and Chapman (1969) found that illusory correlations influenced perceptions of homosexuality among clinicians and lay people alike. In one study, clinicians responding to a survey were asked to describe their own observations of the kinds of responses “prominent in the Rorschach protocols of men with problems concerning homosexual impulses” (Chapman & Chapman, 1969, p.273).<sup>7</sup> The responses that the clinicians reported that they had observed more frequently with homosexual respondents (e.g., human/animal anal content, feminine clothing, humans with sex confused) had in fact been found in separate empirical studies *not* to be unusually prevalent among homosexual respondents. The clinicians’ associations of certain signs with homosexuality, in other words, were not accurate. The Chapmans found, however, that the signs listed by the clinicians closely matched those associated by members of the lay public with homosexuality. The clinicians’ impressions thus appeared to have been shaped by cultural ideologies about homosexuality rather than by their own unbiased observations.

In a subsequent experimental study, the Chapmans presented college students with various types of responses to a series of Rorschach cards, each response attributed to a person manifesting particular “symptoms.” For example, the response of “a woman’s buttocks” on Card IX might have been attributed to a man who “has sexual feelings toward other men” or, alternatively, to a man who “feels sad and depressed much of the time.” Although each kind of response was paired with each symptom exactly the same number of times, the students perceived that particular responses were given more frequently by homosexual men. These were the *same* responses that clinicians in the first study had believed to be associated with homosexuality. The Chapmans concluded that the students’ observations, like those of the

clinicians, had been influenced by their pre-existing ideas about homosexuality; they erroneously remembered “seeing” certain Rorschach signs more frequently because those signs fit with their preconceptions.

Because of illusory correlations, and the selective perception and recall of stereotype-confirming information, antigay stereotypes are very resistant to change, even when reality contradicts them. Thus, many heterosexuals erroneously “see” (or remember seeing) a disproportionate number of gay men and women who are maladjusted, obsessed with sex, and incapable of committed relationships. They fail to notice gay people who violate these stereotypes or heterosexuals who fulfill them.

*The content of antigay stereotypes.* Negative stereotypes about lesbians and gay men, like those about other minority groups, do not result from cognitive processes that occur in a social vacuum. Rather, they are shaped by historically-evolved cultural ideologies that justify the subjugation of minorities. Because these ideologies are ubiquitous in popular discourse (e.g., through mass media), individual stereotypes are continually reinforced. Some stereotypes reflect ideologies that are specific to a particular out-group. Gay men, for example, are presumed to manifest characteristics that are culturally defined as “feminine,” and lesbians are widely believed to manifest “masculine” characteristics (e.g., Herek, 1984a; Kite & Deaux, 1986, 1987).<sup>8</sup> This belief is sufficiently strong that men and women who manifest

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<sup>7</sup> Note that this study was conducted before the 1973 decision by the American Psychiatric Association to remove homosexuality as a diagnosis from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual.

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<sup>8</sup> As with popular images of gay sexuality, this stereotype reflects, in part, differences between the gay community and the dominant heterosexual culture in norms concerning gender roles. Lesbian and gay communities are considerably more accepting of behaviors that would be perceived by the larger society as violations of gender roles, and many gay men and lesbians choose to violate gender norms for political reasons. Sexual orientation is not inherently related to gender role conformity or nonconformity, as evidenced by similarities between gay and heterosexual samples in studies of gender role orientation (e.g., Stokes, Kilmann, & Wanlass, 1983).

characteristics inconsistent with those culturally prescribed for their gender are more likely than others to be labeled homosexual (Deaux & Lewis, 1984; Storms, Stivers, Lambers, & Hill, 1981). Lesbians and gay men who violate stereotypical expectations, as many do, may actually be disliked (Laner & Laner, 1979; Storms, 1978), and an individual who is perceived as being able to label a non-obvious homosexual may subsequently be better liked by others (Karr, 1978).

Other stereotypes reflect cultural ideologies about out-groups in general, usually portraying out-group members as simultaneously threatening and inferior to members of the dominant in-group. Adam (1978) has documented some themes common to cultural images of gay people, Blacks, and Jews alike: All are perceived as animalistic, hypersexual, overvisible, heretical and conspiratorial (see also Gilman, 1985). Yet another ideology ascribes disease (physical and mental) to all three groups. As Szasz (1970) noted, for example, Benjamin Rush (considered by many to be the father of American psychiatry) proposed that being Black was itself an illness, a form of congenital leprosy. Being Black also was equated by many 19th century White Americans with being insane; further, free Blacks were alleged to be substantially more prone to mental illness than were Black slaves (Gilman, 1985). In 1851, Samuel Cartwright even identified a form of psychopathology unique to Blacks: *Drapetomania*, a disease that caused Black slaves to run away from their owners (quoted in Gilman, 1985, p. 138). Jews also have been regarded as mentally ill (Gilman, 1985) and as carriers of disease, e.g., plague in the 14th century (W. McNeill, 1976) and venereal disease in Nazi Germany (see Erikson, 1963, for an account of the Nazi stereotype of Jews). Similarly, homosexuality was officially labeled a mental illness by the American Psychiatric Association in the 1952 and 1968 editions of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Psychiatric Disorders (Bayer, 1987). This classification, which was eliminated in 1973 (leaving only the diagnosis of "ego-dystonic homosexuality" which was dropped in 1986), originally was

urged by mental health professionals who considered it preferable to the then-prevalent view of homosexuality as criminal (see Berube, 1990). Empirical evidence, however, overwhelmingly showed no correlation between sexual orientation and psychopathology (see Gonsiorek, this volume).

*Case study of a stereotype: Homosexuals and children.* A particularly powerful cultural image of outgroups portrays them as threats to the in-group's most vulnerable members (e.g., children, women). Anita Bryant, who campaigned successfully in 1977 to repeal a Dade County (FL) ordinance prohibiting antigay discrimination, frequently appealed to stereotypes based on this image. For example, she named her organization "Save Our Children." She summarized the dual focus of this cultural ideology in her comments about homosexual teachers: "First, public approval of admitted homosexual teachers could encourage more homosexuality by inducing pupils into looking upon it as an acceptable life-style. And second, a particularly deviant-minded teacher could sexually molest children" (Bryant, 1977, p. 114).

Although both statements are wrong, this chapter will focus only on the second of Bryant's assertions (for data that the presence of a gay role model does not encourage otherwise heterosexual children to adopt a homosexual orientation, see Falk [1989] and Green, Mandel, Hotvedt, Gray, & Smith [1986]). Newton (1978) concluded from his review of the literature that gay men are no more likely than heterosexual men to molest children (although sexual abuse by women occurs [Johnson & Shrier, 1987], it appears to be rare). In perhaps the most sophisticated study of its kind, Groth and Birnbaum (1978) found that, in their sample of 175 adult males who were convicted in Massachusetts of sexual assault against a child, *none* had an exclusively homosexual adult sexual orientation. Most of the men (83 or 47%) were classified as "fixated," meaning that they had never developed an adult sexual orientation; 70 (40%) others were classified as adult heterosexuals; the remaining 22 (13%) were

classified as adult bisexuals, meaning that “in their adult relationships they engaged in sex on occasion with men as well as with women. However, in no case did this attraction to men exceed their preference for women....There were no men who were primarily sexually attracted to other adult males...” (p.180). Since 1978, no credible new data have been published that contradict the conclusions of Newton (1978) or Groth and Birnbaum (1978).

Why do many lay people continue to believe this stereotype? One reason is that understanding the data concerning child molestation requires sufficient knowledge and sophistication to distinguish male-male sexual molestation from adult homosexuality, and to understand that male-male molestations are perpetrated by men who are heterosexuals or who lack any adult sexual orientation (Groth & Birnbaum, 1978). Once parents have perceived a threat to their children, however, their level of emotional arousal typically is too high to permit easy assimilation of such complex concepts. Instead, they are prone to overly simplistic thinking, errors of reasoning, and faulty decisionmaking processes (Janis & Mann, 1977; Kahneman, Slovic, & Tversky, 1982).

The highly emotional reaction evoked by the topic of child sexual abuse undoubtedly is a major reason why antigay activists promulgate the stereotype. A notable example is a pamphlet titled “Child Molestation and Homosexuality,” distributed in 1985 by the Institute for the Scientific Investigation of Sexuality (ISIS) whose chairperson was listed as Paul Cameron, Ph.D.<sup>9</sup> The pamphlet cover features a

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<sup>9</sup> Paul Cameron has been labeled in the gay press as “the most dangerous antigay voice in the United States today” (Walter, 1985, p.28; see also Fettner, 1985). In 1984, all members of the American Psychological Association received official written notice that “Paul Cameron (Nebraska) was dropped from membership for a violation of the Preamble to the *Ethical Principles of Psychologists*.” At its membership meeting on October 19, 1984, the Nebraska Psychological Association adopted a resolution stating that it “formally disassociates itself from the representations and interpretations of scientific literature offered by Dr. Paul Cameron in

photograph of a young boy being pulled by a male arm into a men’s restroom along with the caption, “Homosexuality is a crime against humanity.” Among its many questionable conclusions, the pamphlet states, “gays perpetrated between a third and a half of all recorded [child] molestations” and “gays are thus at least 12 times more apt to molest children than heterosexuals are....” These assertions are based on the author’s untenable “assumption that all molestations of boys were by homosexuals.” The same erroneous assumption is the basis for a paper published by the same author, provocatively titled “Child Molestation and Homosexuality” (Cameron et al., 1986). Drawing data from a door-to-door survey in seven U.S. cities and towns, Cameron refers to male-male sexual assaults as “homosexual” molestations (e.g., Abstract, p.327), despite his lack of data about the sexual orientation of perpetrators.<sup>10</sup>

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his writings and public statements on sexuality.” In 1985, the American Sociological Association adopted a resolution which included the assertion that “Dr. Paul Cameron has consistently misinterpreted and misrepresented sociological research on sexuality, homosexuality, and lesbianism” (“Sociology group criticizes work of Paul Cameron,” 1985). Cameron’s credibility has also been questioned outside of academia. In his written opinion in *Baker v. Wade* (1985), Judge Buchmeyer of the U.S. District Court of Dallas referred to “Cameron’s sworn statement that ‘homosexuals abuse children at a proportionately greater incident than do heterosexuals,’” and concluded that “Dr. Paul Cameron...has himself made misrepresentations to this Court” and that “There has been no fraud or misrepresentations except by Dr. Cameron” (p.536).

<sup>10</sup> Brown and Cole (1985) criticized the sampling methods of Cameron et al. (1985, 1986) for several reasons: The representativeness of their sample is highly doubtful; the locations for data collection (Omaha [NE], Los Angeles [CA], Denver [CO], Washington [DC], Louisville [KY?], Bennett [NE], and Rochester [NY]) appear to have been selected solely on the basis of convenience; and the sampling methods are not adequately described in their published reports. Additionally, the response rate appears to have been unacceptably low. Cameron et

Falsely accusing minority group members of child molestation is not a unique strategy to antigay activists. Historically, disliked minority groups often have been portrayed as preying upon the vulnerable, especially young children. Oberman (1984), for example, quoted a 16th century German account of how a group of Jews “purchased seven Christian children” whom they subsequently “pierced with needles and knives, tortured, and finally killed,” and then “prepared the blood with pomegranates and served it for dinner” (p. 99). As noted by Adam (1978), lynchings of American Blacks were traditionally justified with the contention that “many Negroes were literally wild beasts with uncontrollable sexual passions” (p.45); Black males were portrayed as a threat to White women. Today, a decreasing number of Americans believe the accusation that gay people are child molesters, as evidenced in the Gallup poll data that 42% of respondents would allow gay people to be elementary school teachers (Colasanto, 1989). Nevertheless, many of the remaining 58% undoubtedly continue to accept the stereotype.

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al. (1985, 1986) report their “compliance rate” to be 43.5%. Based on the figures and calculation methods provided in the published papers, this rate should actually be 47.5%. Even this corrected percentage, however, is not the appropriate one for assessing the adequacy of the sample. Instead, a *response rate* (R) should be calculated as:

$$R = C/T$$

where C = the number of completed interviews and T = the Total number of eligible elements, i.e., the sum of completed interviews and mail-ins *plus* mail-ins not returned *plus* refusals *plus* “not at homes.” Unfortunately, Cameron et al. (1985, 1986) report the number of “not homes” in combination with vacant units; the former should be included in the response rate calculation, but the latter should not. Thus, only a lower limit for their true response rate can be computed from their published data; this lower limit is  $R = 4340/(4340 + 1426 + 3363 + 9289) = 24\%$ . Whether the true response rate is closer to 47% or 24%, we must conclude that the Cameron et al. sample does not permit generalizations from the data to any larger population.

### ***The Psychological Functions of Antigay Prejudice***

National surveys reveal that heterosexual Americans show considerable variability in their attitudes toward lesbians and gay men. This raises the question of why some heterosexuals are strongly hostile toward gay people while others are tolerant or accepting in their attitudes. This question has been addressed by Herek (1984a, 1986a, 1987b), using a perspective that other researchers earlier applied to Whites’ attitudes toward Blacks (Katz, Sarnoff, & McClintock, 1956; McClintock, 1958) and Americans’ attitudes toward Russians (Smith, Bruner, & White, 1956). Within this *functional* approach, attitudes are understood according to the psychological needs they meet.

From a content analysis of essays about homosexuality written by 205 heterosexual college students, Herek (1987b) detected three principal functions. Attitudes serving an *Experiential-Schematic* function assisted the respondent in making sense of her or his previous interactions with gay people, and provided a guide for future behavior. Those who had experienced pleasant interactions with a gay man or lesbian, for example, generalized from that experience and accepted gay people in general. A total of 14% of the respondents had attitudes serving an exclusively *Experiential-Schematic* function; another 9% manifested the *Experiential-Schematic* function along with one or more others.

In contrast to the *Experiential-Schematic* function, the other attitude functions were not based on actual experiences with gay people. Rather, they were beneficial to the respondent in that they permitted expression of important aspects of the self. Attitudes serving a *Self-Expressive* function increased the respondent’s feelings of self-esteem in either of two ways: 1) By expressing values of central importance to her or his self-concept (e.g., a fundamentalist Christian condemning homosexuality as a way of affirming her or his religious identity) and 2) by expressing opinions supported by friends or family (e.g., telling a “fag joke” in order to gain others’ friendship). A plurality of the

respondents (40%) had attitudes serving an exclusively Self-Expressive function; another 43% manifested this function along with others. In a second study, Herek (1987b) found that the Self-Expressive function can be further broken down into *Value-Expressive* and *Social-Expressive* functions.

Finally, some respondents' attitudes served a *Defensive* function: They reduced anxiety associated with an unconscious psychological conflict, e.g., personal conflicts about sexuality or gender. With Defensive attitudes, an unacceptable part of the self is projected onto gay people; by rejecting (or even attacking) gay people, individuals are able symbolically to attack that unacceptable aspect of themselves. A total of 11% of the respondents manifested a Defensive function, and another 24% manifested Defensive attitudes in conjunction with one or more other functions.

The functional approach is important not only because it explains the motivations for antigay prejudice in individuals, but also because it suggests a strategy for changing attitudes. Prejudice can be eradicated most effectively by appealing to the primary psychological functions that it serves. This means that different strategies will be necessary for changing the antigay attitudes held by different individuals. For example, creating social norms that support acceptance of gay people will be an effective strategy for reducing prejudice among heterosexuals whose hostile attitudes derive from their need to be accepted by others. Presenting alternative, noncondemnatory religious perspectives on homosexuality (e.g., Boswell, 1980; J. McNeill, 1976) will be most likely to have a positive effect on individuals whose prejudice results from their need to perceive themselves as a religious person. The effectiveness of this strategy will be increased when respected religious leaders publicly support acceptance of gay women and men (see Herek, 1984a, 1986a, 1987b for further discussion).

### **The Consequences of Antigay Prejudice**

Like members of other stigmatized groups,

gay people face numerous psychological challenges as a result of society's hostility toward them. In addition to the psychological consequences of antigay prejudice detailed elsewhere in this volume (see Chapter 00), three topics warrant brief elaboration in the present chapter: consequences of hiding one's sexual orientation, consequences of overt victimization, and consequences of antigay prejudice for heterosexuals (see also Garnets, Herek, & Levy, 1990).

As a result of antigay prejudice, many individuals feel compelled to hide their homosexuality or "pass" as heterosexual (e.g., Humphreys, 1972; see also Goffman, 1963). Respondents to the Teichner national survey of lesbians and gay men, for example, waited an average of 4.6 years after knowing they were gay until they came out (which presumably involved disclosing their homosexual orientation to another person). Depending on the area of the country, between 23% and 40% had *not* told their family that they were gay; between 37% and 59% had *not* disclosed their sexual orientation to coworkers ("Results of poll," 1989). Hiding one's sexual orientation creates a painful discrepancy between public and private identities. Because they face unwitting acceptance of themselves by prejudiced heterosexuals, gay people who are passing may feel inauthentic, that they are living a lie, and that others would not accept them if they knew the truth (Goffman, 1963; Jones et al., 1984). The need to pass is likely to disrupt longstanding family relationships and friendships as lesbians and gay men create distance from others in order to avoid revealing their sexual orientation. When contact cannot be avoided, they may keep their interactions at a superficial level as a self-protective strategy. Passing also creates considerable strain for gay relationships. Even openly gay people are deprived of institutional support for their long-term relationships (e.g., insurance benefits). Those who are passing additionally must actively hide or deny their relationship to family and friends; consequently, the problems and stresses common to any relationship must be faced without the social supports typically available to heterosexual

lovers or spouses.

Once they come out, lesbians and gay men risk rejection by others, discrimination, and even violence, all experiences with psychological consequences that can endure long after their immediate physical effects have dissipated (Garnets et al., 1990). Being the target of discrimination, for example, often leads to feelings of sadness and anxiety (Dion, 1986); it also can lead to an increased sense that life is difficult and unfair, and dissatisfaction with one's larger community (Birt & Dion, 1987). Suffering assault or other overt victimization can create considerable psychological distress. As for any crime victim, consequences typically include immediate feelings of disbelief, denial, and fear; this initial reaction often is followed by alternations from fear to anger, sadness to elation, self-pity to guilt, self-confidence to inadequacy. Feelings of personal loss, rejection, humiliation, and depression are common. Behavioral and somatic reactions include sleep disturbances and nightmares, headaches, diarrhea, uncontrollable crying, agitation and restlessness, increased use of drugs, and deterioration in personal relationships (e.g., Bard & Sangry, 1979; Frieze, Hymer, & Greenberg, 1984; Janoff-Bulman & Frieze, 1983). Additionally, antigay attacks may be interpreted as violations of oneself as a gay person and may revive earlier feelings of "internalized homophobia" (Malyon, 1982). Attempts to make sense of the attack, coupled with the common need to perceive the world as a just place, may lead to feelings of being punished for being gay (Bard & Sangrey, 1979; Lerner, 1970). This type of self-blame can lead to feelings of depression and helplessness (Janoff-Bulman, 1979), even in individuals who are comfortable with their sexual orientation. Those who are still coming to terms with their gay identity may experience added psychological distress, both because they lack a strongly developed gay identity that would increase their psychological resilience and coping skills, and because they lack adequate social support from others who can affirm their gay identity (Anderson, 1982; Garnets et al., 1990).

Although not often discussed, antigay prejudice also has negative consequences for heterosexuals. Because of the stigma attached to homosexuality, many heterosexuals restrict their own behavior in order to avoid being labeled as gay; this pattern appears to be especially strong among American males (e.g., Herek, 1986b; Lehne, 1976; Pleck, 1981). For example, many men avoid clothing, hobbies, and mannerisms that might be labeled "effeminate." Antigay prejudice also interferes with same-sex friendships. Males with strongly antigay attitudes appear to have less intimate nonsexual friendships with other men than do males with tolerant attitudes (Devlin & Cowan, 1985).

### **AIDS and Antigay Prejudice**

Much as the 19th century cholera epidemics were popularly portrayed as visitations (either Divine or Natural) upon Catholics, Blacks, and other disliked American minorities (Rosenberg, 1987), the 20th-century AIDS epidemic has been interpreted by some as God's punishment for male homosexuality (Blendon & Donelan, 1988; Herek, 1990b; Herek & Glunt, 1988). In a *CBS/New York Times* poll (9/88), the proportion of respondents with "a lot" of sympathy for people with AIDS was 46%; when asked specifically about sympathy for "people who get AIDS from homosexual activity," however, the proportion dropped to 17%. Those who replied "not much" or who volunteered that they felt no sympathy at all for people who get AIDS from homosexual activity was 60%, in contrast to 20% when homosexuality was not mentioned in the question. Hostility toward gay people is correlated with overestimating the risks of HIV-transmission through casual contact and with endorsement of punitive and restrictive AIDS-related policies (Herek & Glunt, 1990; Pleck, O'Donnell, O'Donnell, & Snarey, 1988; Pryor, Reeder, & Vinacco, 1989; Stipp & Kerr, 1989). About one-tenth of the respondents to *Gallup* polls indicated that they had begun to avoid homosexuals as a way to avoid getting AIDS or that they planned to do so (12% in 1987, 11% in 1988).

Despite these examples of the connection

between AIDS-related stigma and antigay prejudice, however, the exact nature of the relationship is not yet clear. Most heterosexuals probably developed their attitudes toward gay people before the AIDS epidemic; AIDS thus may simply have provided a convenient hook upon which to hang preexisting prejudice (Herek & Glunt, 1988). Many groups monitoring antigay violence reported an upsurge in incidents when public awareness about AIDS increased during the mid-1980s (Berrill, 1990; Herek, 1989). Although this increase may partly reflect improved reporting, many of the assailants in the attacks made verbal references to AIDS. Of the 7248 incidents of antigay harassment and victimization reported to the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force in 1988, 1259 (17%) were AIDS-related; in 1986 and 1987, the percentages were 14% and 15%, respectively (Berrill, 1989). As more heterosexuals have become better informed about AIDS, however, the apparent rise in antigay prejudice may have reversed, with support now increasing for legalizing homosexual relations and for equal employment opportunities (Colasanto, 1989; Schneider, 1986).

### **Eliminating Antigay Prejudice**

Because antigay attitudes have complex cultural roots, are affected by many other social and psychological variables, and serve a variety of psychological functions, they cannot be eradicated through any one approach. Nevertheless, two clear conclusions can be drawn from empirical research. First, heterosexuals with openly gay friends or acquaintances are more likely than others to hold accepting attitudes toward gay people in general (see, e.g., Gentry, 1987; Herek, 1984a, 1988; Schneider & Lewis, 1984). This pattern may result partly from a preference among gay people for disclosing their sexual orientation to others perceived as likely to be already supportive (Schneider, 1986; Weinberg, 1983; Wells & Kline, 1987). Nevertheless, knowing an openly gay person is predictive of supportive attitudes even in demographic groups where hostility is the norm, e.g., among the highly

religious and the uneducated (Schneider & Lewis, 1984).

Second, heterosexuals' attitudes tend to become more favorable after they are exposed to an educational program about gay people and homosexuality (Stevenson, 1988). Attitude change has been documented after general human sexuality courses (Cerny & Polyson, 1984), courses and workshops on homosexuality (Anderson, 1981; Morin, 1974), lectures about homosexuality (Goldberg, 1982), lectures by openly gay people (Lance, 1987; Pagtolun-An & Clair, 1986), video presentations featuring gay people (Goldberg, 1982), videos ridiculing prejudice against other (non-gay) minority groups (Goldberg, 1982), and exercises in which participants role-played a gay person coming out to others (Serdaheley & Ziemba, 1984). The only strategy demonstrated to be counter-productive is exposing heterosexuals to explicitly sexual films or videos about homosexuality (Goldberg, 1982; Nevid, 1983), which may evoke discomfort, anxiety, and other negative feelings among heterosexual viewers (Mosher & O'Grady, 1979). Even this effect appears to be diminished by combining presentation of the sexually-explicit material with one or more other attitude-change strategies (Anderson, 1981; Cerny & Polyson, 1984).

Several possible reasons can be suggested for why educational programs and courses change attitudes. They may serve principally to provide factual information and refute stereotypes about gay people. Or they may provide an opportunity for developing positive feelings toward a specific gay person. Alternatively, they may create social norms that promote tolerance and discourage antigay prejudice, or they may simply cue participants to provide "correct" (i.e., unprejudiced) responses to attitude measures regardless of their own true attitudes. Because the studies conducted to date have not investigated the social psychological variables involved in their "treatment" conditions, we do not know which of these factors played a role in fostering attitude change.

The research described in this chapter offers additional ideas for combating prejudice

against lesbians and gay men. Recognizing the cognitive processes that underlie prejudice, for example, reveals the limitations inherent in attitude-change strategies that simply provide heterosexuals with “the facts” about gay people. Such strategies are likely to be undermined by selective perception, selective recall, and illusory correlation; the “facts” are perceived through the lens of individuals’ preconceptions. Informational strategies must directly confront these cognitive processes, e.g., by providing memorable examples of gay people that contradict existing stereotypes.

The motivations for antigay prejudice are broader than a simple desire to possess accurate information about the world. The functional approach to attitudes suggests that antigay stereotypes and prejudices often reflect needs for self-esteem or social support. It highlights the importance of understanding how heterosexuals benefit from expressing antigay attitudes, and provides a general strategy for changing negative attitudes by making them dysfunctional. Further, this approach reminds us that any effective program of attitude change must not only provide information about gay people (preferably through personal contact), but also must confront religious values, social norms, and personal anxieties.

Antigay prejudice cannot be eradicated among individuals without simultaneously attacking its institutional roots (Berrill & Herek, 1990; Herek, 1990a). Institutional changes such as enactment of anti-discrimination statutes and policies have at least two effects on individual attitudes. First, they identify antigay discrimination and prejudice as unacceptable and require that people modify their behavior accordingly. One likely consequence of such behavior change is attitude change: People who are required to act in a non-prejudiced manner may subsequently change their attitudes as well. Second, institutional change permits and encourages lesbians and gay men to disclose their sexual orientation to coworkers, neighbors, and others. Coming out to heterosexuals is perhaps the most powerful strategy lesbians and gay men have available for attacking prejudice.

Empirical research with other minority groups has shown that inter-group contact often reduces prejudice in the majority group when the contact meets several conditions: When it makes shared goals salient, when inter-group cooperation is encouraged, when the contact is ongoing and intimate rather than brief and superficial, when representatives of the two groups are of equal status, and when they share important values (Allport, 1954; Amir, 1969). These conditions are most fully met when lesbians and gay men disclose their sexual orientation to their relatives, friends, neighbors, and coworkers. By coming out to their loved ones, gay people can refute myths and stereotypes, change social norms, and challenge traditional moral values concerning sexuality by juxtaposing them against values of caring for a loved one.

As the decade of the 1990s begins, prejudice against lesbians and gay men appears finally to be facing serious challenges throughout American society. Some aspects of heterosexuals’ attitudes are changing, albeit slowly. Lesbians and gay men now are widely perceived as a minority group entitled to at least some of the legal protections accorded other minorities. In contrast to the situation only 20 years ago, Americans now appear to think differently about homosexuality depending upon the context in which it is raised: Many still consider homosexual behavior to be immoral from a religious perspective yet, within a legal context, they consider gay people to be entitled to freedom from discrimination. This change offers optimism for future prospects of eliminating prejudice against lesbians and gay men.

Joining the chorus of outcry against this long-entrenched form of bigotry are social and behavioral scientists, who have recognized it as a serious societal problem. They have created an impressive body of scientific theory and empirical research on the social and psychological bases of hostility toward lesbians and gay men. This ever-expanding knowledge base offers tools for formulating and implementing social policy that will hasten the

elimination of antigay prejudice.

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