



## Beyond “Homophobia”: Thinking About Sexual Prejudice and Stigma in the Twenty-First Century

Gregory M. Herek

**Abstract:** George Weinberg’s introduction of the term *homophobia* in the late 1960s challenged traditional thinking about homosexuality and helped focus society’s attention on the problem of antigay prejudice and stigma. This paper briefly describes the history and impact of homophobia. The term’s limitations are discussed, including its underlying assumption that antigay prejudice is based mainly on fear and its inability to account for historical changes in how society regards homosexuality and heterosexuality as the bases for social identities. Although the importance of Weinberg’s contribution should not be underestimated, a new vocabulary is needed to advance scholarship in this area. Toward this end, three constructs are defined and discussed: *sexual stigma* (the shared knowledge of society’s negative regard for any nonheterosexual behavior, identity, relationship, or community), *heterosexism* (the cultural ideology that perpetuates sexual stigma), and *sexual prejudice* (individuals’ negative attitudes based on sexual orientation). The concept of *internalized homophobia* is briefly considered.

**Key words:** antigay prejudice; heterosexism; heteronormativity; homosexuality; George Weinberg

Two historic events occurred in the early 1970s, each with profound consequences for later discourse about sexual orientation in the United States and much of the rest of the world. One event’s impact was immediate. In 1973, the American Psychiatric Association Board of Directors voted to remove homosexuality from its *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM), declaring that a same-sex orientation is not inherently associated with psychopathology (Bayer, 1987; Minton, 2002). Homosexuality had been a diagnostic category in the DSM since the manual’s first edition in 1952, and its classification as a disease was rooted in a nineteenth century medical model (Bayer, 1987; Chauncey, 1982-1983). The 1973 vote, its ratification by the Association’s members in 1974, and its strong endorsement by other professional groups such as the American Psychological Association (Conger, 1975)

signaled a dramatic shift in how medicine, the mental health profession, and the behavioral sciences regarded homosexuality.

The second event was not as widely noted as the psychiatrists’ action but its ultimate impact was also profound. In 1972, psychologist George Weinberg published *Society and the Healthy Homosexual* and introduced a term that was new to most of his readers, *homophobia*.<sup>1</sup> With that one word, Weinberg neatly challenged entrenched thinking about the “problem” of homosexuality. To be sure, the legitimacy of anti-homosexual hostility had been questioned in the United States after World War II and in Europe

---

1. To avoid confusion, I use “homophobia” throughout this article only to refer to the term itself, its history, and its usage. When I am discussing the phenomena to which homophobia refers, I use other terms such as antigay hostility or sexual prejudice.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Gregory M. Herek, Department of Psychology, University of California, Davis, California, 95616-8686. <http://psychology.ucdavis.edu/rainbow>

decades earlier (Adam, 1987). But critiques by homophile activists had not yet achieved widespread currency when Weinberg published his 1972 book. Weinberg gave a name to the hostility and helped popularize the belief that it constituted a social problem worthy of scholarly analysis and intervention. His term became an important tool for gay and lesbian activists, advocates, and their allies.

The present article is at once an homage to George Weinberg for his role in shaping how American society thinks about sexual orientation, and an argument for the importance of moving beyond homophobia to a new conceptualization of antigay hostility. Although homophobia's invention and eventual integration into common speech marked a watershed in American society's conceptualization of sexuality, both the word and the construct it signifies have significant limitations. Some of them, such as the term's implicit theoretical assumptions, have been remarked upon frequently. Less often noted are the changes in conceptions of homosexuality and hostility toward those who manifest it that have occurred in the decades since homophobia was first coined. Before considering these limitations, it is appropriate to discuss how homophobia first developed.

### Looking Back: The Invention of "Homophobia"

Contemporary scholars and activists have used homophobia to refer to sexual attitudes dating back as far as ancient Greece (e.g., Fone, 2000). As noted above, however, the term itself is of more recent vintage. George Weinberg coined homophobia several years before publication of his 1972 book. A heterosexual psychologist trained in psychoanalytic techniques at Columbia University, he was taught to regard homosexuality as a pathology. Homosexual patients' problems—whether associated with relationships, work, or any other aspect of their lives—were understood as ultimately stemming from their sexual orientation. Having personally known several gay people, however, Weinberg believed this assumption to be fundamentally wrong. By the mid-1960s, he was an active supporter of New York's

fledgling gay movement.<sup>2</sup>

It was in September of 1965, while preparing an invited speech for the East Coast Homophile Organizations (ECHO) banquet, that Weinberg hit upon the idea that would develop into homophobia. In an interview, he told me he was reflecting on the fact that many heterosexual psychoanalysts evinced strongly negative personal reactions to being around a homosexual in a nonclinical setting. It occurred to him that these reactions could be described as a phobia:<sup>3</sup>

"I coined the word homophobia to mean it was a phobia about homosexuals....It was a fear of homosexuals which seemed to be associated with a fear of contagion, a fear of reducing the things one fought for—home and family. It was a religious fear and it had led to great brutality as fear always does."<sup>4</sup>

Weinberg eventually discussed his idea with his friends Jack Nichols and Lige Clarke, gay activists who would be the first to use homophobia in an English-language publication. They wrote a weekly column on gay topics in *Screw* magazine, a raunchy tabloid otherwise oriented to heterosexual men. In their May 23, 1969, column—to which *Screw's* publisher, Al Goldstein, attached the headline "He-Man Horse Shit"—Nichols and Clarke used homophobia to refer to heterosexuals' fears that others might think they are homosexual. Such fear, they wrote, limited men's experiences by declaring off limits such "sissified" things as poetry, art, movement, and touching. Although that was the first printed occurrence of homophobia, Nichols told me emphatically that George

2. Additional biographical information about George Weinberg is available in his foreword to Nichols (1996) and in Nichols (2002).

3. Personal interview by the author with George Weinberg, October 30, 1998. Weinberg told me that he coined the term homophobia some time after his ECHO speech but was not certain exactly when; he guessed that it was in 1966 or 1967. Nichols (2000) states that Weinberg began using homophobia in 1967.

4. Personal interview by the author with George Weinberg, October 30, 1998. Weinberg also discussed the origin of homophobia in a 2002 interview (Ayyar, 2002).

Weinberg originated the term.<sup>5</sup>

Weinberg's first published use of homophobia came two years later in a July 19, 1971, article he wrote for Nichols' newsweekly, *Gay*. Titled "Words for the New Culture," the essay defined homophobia as "the dread of being in close quarters with homosexuals—and in the case of homosexuals themselves, self-loathing." He described the consequences of homophobia, emphasizing its strong linkage to enforcement of male gender norms:

[A] great many men are withheld from embracing each other or kissing each other, and women are not. Moreover, it is expected that men will not express fondness for each other, or longing for each other's company, as openly as women do. It is expected that men will not see beauty in the physical forms of other men, or enjoy it, whereas women may openly express admiration for the beauty of other women....Millions of fathers feel that it would not befit them to kiss their sons affectionately or embrace them, whereas mothers can kiss and embrace their daughters as well as their sons. It is expected that men, even lifetime friends, will not sit as close together on a couch while talking earnestly as women may; they will not look into each other's faces as steadily or as fondly.<sup>6</sup>

Weinberg also made it clear that he considered homophobia a form of prejudice directed by one group at another:

When a phobia incapacitates a person from engaging in activities considered decent by society, the person himself is the sufferer....But here the

phobia appears as antagonism directly toward a particular group of people. Inevitably, it leads to disdain toward the people themselves, and to mistreatment of them. The phobia in operation is a prejudice, and this means we can widen our understanding by considering the phobia from the point of view of its being a prejudice and then uncovering its motives (Weinberg, 1971; see also Weinberg, 1972, p. 8).

The idea of framing prejudice against homosexuals as a social problem worthy of examination in its own right predated Weinberg's article (for an earlier example in the *Mattachine Review*, see Harding, 1955). However, the invention of homophobia was a milestone. It crystallized the experiences of rejection, hostility, and invisibility that homosexual men and women in mid-20th century North America had experienced throughout their lives. The term stood a central assumption of heterosexual society on its head by locating the "problem" of homosexuality not in homosexual people, but in heterosexuals who were intolerant of gay men and lesbians. It did so while questioning society's rules about gender, especially as they applied to males.

Antigay critics have recognized the power inherent in homophobia. Former U.S. congressman William Dannemeyer complained that homophobia shifts the terms of debate away from the idea "that homosexuals are disturbed people by saying that it is those who disapprove of them who are mentally unbalanced, that *they* are in the grips of a 'phobia'" (Dannemeyer, 1989, p. 129; emphasis in original). Lamenting the popularity of both *gay* and *homophobia*, Dannemeyer warned ominously that "the use of the two in tandem has had a profound effect on the dialogue concerning these crucial issues and has tipped the scales, perhaps irreversibly, in favor of the homosexuals" (p. 130).

Weinberg's term has enjoyed steadily increasing popularity. It appeared in *Time* magazine a few months after Clarke and Nichols' 1969 *Screw* column ("The Homosexual," 1969). The *Oxford English Dictionary* now contains an entry for homophobia (Simpson & Weiner, 1993). Political activists routinely include homophobia with sexism and racism when they list social evils related to discrimination and bigotry. The phenomenon named by Weinberg has also become a

5. Personal interview by the author with Jack Nichols, November 5, 1998. Plummer (1981) suggested that Weinberg derived homophobia from "homoerotophobia," a term proposed by Wainwright Churchill (1967). However, Weinberg arrived at the idea of homophobia before publication of Churchill's book. Moreover, comparison of the two authors' works reveals many conceptual differences between homophobia and homoerotophobia. Discussion of these differences is beyond the scope of the present paper.

6. I am indebted to Jack Nichols for kindly providing me with the text of Weinberg's 1971 column from his personal archives of *Gay*. The 1971 column was reprinted in *Gay* on January 24, 1972, wherein the text cited here and in the next quoted passage appeared on page 14. A slightly edited version of this passage appeared in Weinberg (1972, p. 6).

topic of scholarly inquiry by researchers from a wide range of perspectives and academic disciplines. In February of 2004, a computer search for “homophobia” and its variants yielded more than 1,700 citations in the PsycInfo and Sociological Abstracts databases.

Moreover, homophobia has served as a model for conceptualizing a variety of negative attitudes based on sexuality and gender. Derivative terms such as *lesbophobia* (Kitzinger, 1986), *biphobia* (Ochs & Deihl, 1992), *transphobia* (Norton, 1997), *effeminophobia* (Sedgwick, 1993), and even *heterophobia* (Kitzinger & Perkins, 1993) have emerged as labels for hostility toward, respectively, lesbians, bisexuals, transgender people, effeminate males, and heterosexuals. Early in the AIDS epidemic, some writers characterized the stigma attached to HIV as *AIDS-phobia* (e.g., O’Donnell, O’Donnell, Pleck, Snarey, & Rose, 1987).

Homophobia’s penetration into the English language—and, more fundamentally, the widespread acceptance of the idea that hostility against gay people is a phenomenon that warrants attention—represented a significant advance for the cause of gay and lesbian human rights. Of course, George Weinberg was one activist among many who helped to reshape thinking about homosexuality. But by giving a simple name to that hostility and helping to identify it as a problem for individuals and society, he made a profound and lasting contribution.

### Limitations of “Homophobia”

Even while recognizing homophobia’s importance, we must nevertheless acknowledge its limitations. Some are minor. Etymologically, for example, homophobia is an ambiguous term because the prefix *homo-* can be traced to either Latin or Greek roots. Based on the Latin meaning (“man”), homophobia translates literally into “fear of man” (as in fear of humankind) or “fear of males.” In fact, homophobia was used briefly in the 1920s to mean “fear of men” (Simpson & Weiner, 1993). And, consonant with Clarke and Nichols’ original usage in their 1969 *Screw* column, sociologist Michael Kimmel (1997) has argued that contemporary homophobia is ultimately men’s fear of other men—that is, a man’s fear that other men will expose him as insufficiently masculine.

Most definitions of homophobia follow Weinberg’s, however, and focus on homosexuals—male and female—as the target of fear. They are based on the Greek root of *homo-*, which fits better with the *phobia* suffix (from the Greek *phobos*, meaning fear). With this construction, homophobia means, literally, fear of sameness or fear of the similar. As historian John Boswell noted, fear of homosexuality might more properly be labeled “homosexophobia” (Boswell, 1980, p. 46n).<sup>7</sup> But because “homo” is often used as a derogatory term for gay people in American slang (Boswell, 1993), most listeners have probably assumed that the “homo” in homophobia refers to homosexuals. Thus, a reasonable interpretation of homophobia is fear of “homos,” that is, homosexuals (MacDonald, 1976).

The construction of homophobia also makes sense when placed in historical context. Similarities are readily apparent between homophobia and *xenophobia*, which has been used for at least a century to describe individual and cultural hostility toward outsiders or foreigners. A similar use of phobia can be found in sociologist Erving Goffman’s 1963 work, *Stigma*. Just a few years before Weinberg coined homophobia, Goffman contrasted the “stigmaphobic” responses of most of society to the “stigmaphile” responses of the family and friends of the stigmatized (Goffman, 1963, p. 31). Goffman’s usage of stigmaphile was consistent with progay activists’ self-labeling in the 1950s and 1960s as *homophiles*. The stigmaphobe and homophobe were logical counterparts.

### Homophobia as Fear

The substantive implications of the phobia suffix are more problematic. Phobia is not simply a synonym for fear. According to the second edition of the DSM, the standard diagnostic manual when Weinberg published *Society and the Healthy Homosexual*, a phobia is an intense fear response to a particular object

7. Indeed, some writers have used a similar term, *homosexophobia* (Levitt & Klassen, 1974). And, as cited above, Churchill introduced the construct of *homoeotophobia* to describe societies “in which homosexual behavior is considered unacceptable for all members of the community under any circumstances” (Churchill, 1967, p. 82).

or category of objects. It is irrational, recognized by the patient as not objectively appropriate. And it is associated with unpleasant physiological symptoms that interfere with the life of the phobic individual (American Psychiatric Association, 1980).

Weinberg told me he did not intend to suggest that homophobia represented a diagnostic category on a par with irrational fears of heights or snakes. Yet, he also observed that some heterosexuals react to being around a homosexual in a manner that is not qualitatively dissimilar to the reactions of someone with a snake phobia. In both cases, he suggested, when confronted with the object of their phobia (a homosexual person or a snake), their reaction has a kind of frenzy to it. In his words, it would be something like: "Get-that-out-of-here-I'm-closing-my-eyes-I-don't-want-to-hear-about-it-I-don't-want-to-know-about-it-I-don't-want-to-see-it-and-if-you-don't-get-it-out-of-here-fast-I'm-going-to-knock-you-down!"<sup>8</sup>

Although this type of reaction certainly occurs, the minimal data available do not support the notion that most antigay attitudes represent a true phobia. For example, when two of my colleagues at the University of California at Davis recorded the physiological responses of ostensibly homophobic males to explicit photographs of sex between men, they failed to detect the reactions characteristic of phobias in most of their subjects (Shields & Harriman, 1984). This is not to deny that heterosexuals' negative reactions to sexual minorities might involve fear to some extent, but the nature of such fear remains to be specified. For example, it may be fear of being labeled homosexual rather than fear of homosexuals per se (Kimmel, 1997).

Empirical research more strongly indicates that anger and disgust are central to heterosexuals' negative emotional responses to homosexuality (e.g., Bernat, Calhoun, Adams, & Zeichner, 2001; Ernulf & Innala, 1987; Haddock, Zanna, & Esses, 1993; Herek, 1994; Van de Ven, Bornholt, & Bailey, 1996). Thus, in identifying discontinuities between homophobia and true phobias, Haaga (1991) noted that the emotional component of a phobia is anxiety, whereas the emotional component of homophobia is presumably

anger.<sup>9</sup> These conclusions are consistent with research on emotion and on other types of prejudice, which suggests that anger and disgust are more likely than fear to underlie dominant groups' hostility toward minority groups (e.g., Mackie, Devos, & Smith, 2000; Rozin, Lowery, Imada, & Haidt, 1999; Smith, 1993). Indeed, the dehumanization of gay people in much antigay rhetoric (e.g., Herman, 1997) and the intense brutality that characterizes many hate crimes against sexual minorities (e.g., Herek & Berrill, 1992) are probably more consistent with the emotion of anger than fear (on the association between anger and aggression, see, e.g., Buss & Perry, 1992).

### ***Homophobia as Pathology***

Related to the question of whether homophobia is really about intense, irrational fear is the question of whether it is about diagnosis. Some activists and commentators have embraced the language of psychopathology in discussing homophobia (Brownworth, 2001; Elliott, 1988; Johnson, 1993; Lerner, 1993). Most of their analyses can be considered mainly rhetorical, but some clinicians have argued that homophobia is indeed a psychopathology and others have implicitly accepted homophobia as a valid clinical label for at least some individuals (Kantor, 1998; see also Guindon, Green, & Hanna, 2003; Jones & Sullivan, 2002). Empirical data to support this conceptualization are lacking. Strong aversions and even fear responses to homosexuality are observed in some mentally ill patients. But the broad assertion that homophobia is a pathology seems as unfounded as earlier arguments that homosexuality was an illness. In both cases, clinical language is used to pathologize a

9. He also listed four other discontinuities. The phobic individual regards her or his own fears as excessive or unreasonable, whereas homophobes see their anger as justified. The dysfunctional behavior associated with a phobia is avoidance, whereas with homophobia it is aggression. Homophobia is linked with a political agenda (i.e., the term has been used most often by gay and lesbian people and their supporters in struggles for civil rights), whereas phobias typically are not. Finally, the sufferers of phobias typically are themselves motivated to change their condition. By contrast, the impetus for changing homophobia comes from others—mainly the targets of the attitude (Haaga, 1991).

8. Personal interview by the author with George Weinberg, October 30, 1998.

disliked pattern of thought and behavior, thereby stigmatizing it. Not only does this portray a political position as a scientific, empirically grounded conclusion, but it also reinforces a widespread tendency to conflate psychopathology with evil, and thereby to reinforce the social stigma historically associated with mental illness. “Sick” is often equated with “bad” in popular thought, and the use of homophobia as a clinical label reinforces this unfortunate linkage.

Another concern can be raised about homophobia as a diagnosis. By casting hostility against homosexuality as a purely individual phenomenon—what might be popularly termed a character defect—the notion of homophobia as illness focuses attention on the prejudiced individual while ignoring the larger culture in which that person lives. It thereby constricts our frame of reference. A complete understanding of antigay hostility requires analysis of its roots in culture and social interactions, as well as in individual thought processes (e.g., Herek, 1992; Pharr, 1988). Using the language of illness to discuss antigay and antilebian hostility may seem like a useful political or rhetorical tactic, but I believe it diverts us from understanding the phenomenon.

### ***Homophobia and Androcentrism***

Yet another concern about homophobia is that, although it is usually defined inclusively to refer to hostility toward gay people of both genders, theorizing about it has often focused on heterosexuals’ attitudes toward gay men. In particular, considerable energy has been devoted to trying to explain why heterosexual men are so much more hostile to gay men than are heterosexual women. Relatively little empirical research has specifically examined heterosexuals’ attitudes toward lesbians. This emphasis is apparent in the questionnaires and survey instruments used by researchers, many of which measure attitudes toward “homosexuals” (a term that many heterosexuals probably interpret to mean *male* homosexuals) or attempt to ascertain attitudes toward both gay men and lesbians with a single question. However, heterosexuals’ reactions to gay men differ from their responses to lesbians on some (though not all) issues

related to sexual orientation, and some data suggest that heterosexuals’ attitudes toward lesbians have a different psychological organization from that of their attitudes toward gay men (Herek, 2002; Herek & Capitano, 1999). More fundamentally, lesbian feminist analyses suggest that the oppression of lesbians is qualitatively different from the oppression of gay men (e.g., Kitzinger, 1987; Pellegrini, 1992; Rich, 1980).

### ***The Historical Evolution of Hostility toward Homosexuality***

The limitations of homophobia mentioned so far have been discussed elsewhere (in addition to the works already cited, see Adam, 1998; Fyfe, 1983; Herek, 1984, 1991; Logan, 1996; Nungesser, 1983; Plummer, 1981). Two other concerns also warrant discussion. First, whereas homophobia is overly narrow in its characterization of oppression as ultimately the product of individual fear, it is simultaneously too diffuse in its application. It is now used to encompass phenomena ranging from the private thoughts and feelings of individuals to the policies and actions of governments, corporations, and organized religion. The fact that homophobia is used so broadly is itself an indication of the need for a more nuanced theoretical framework to distinguish among the many phenomena to which it is applied, a need that I discuss below.

Second, within the social psychological realm, homophobia is better suited to the model of sexuality embodied in the early gay movement than that of contemporary sexual minority politics. Homophobia emerged in the zeitgeist of the new gay liberation movement and in important ways implicitly reflects the movement’s position that the boundary between heterosexuality and homosexuality was arbitrary and artificial. But in the past quarter-century, gay and lesbian people in the United States have come to be widely perceived as a quasi-ethnic minority group, and a reformist civil rights paradigm has dominated political activism. This evolution, I believe, has important implications for how heterosexuals’ hostility toward homosexuality is understood. With the emergence of the minority-group, civil-rights paradigm, heterosexuals now have the opportunity to define their personal identities in terms of their

political and religious stance on gay rights without necessarily questioning their own sexuality. Thus, the hardening of boundaries between homosexuality and heterosexuality has enabled heterosexuals to adopt attitudes toward gay and lesbian people based on the latter's outgroup status. The implication of this change is that such attitudes can be understood in terms of intergroup conflicts rather than intrapsychic conflicts. I briefly elaborate on this observation in the paragraphs below.

George Weinberg's book was published just three years after the 1969 Stonewall riots. Homosexuality was still officially classified as a mental illness and nearly all states in the U.S. had sodomy laws. Gay men and, to a lesser extent, lesbians based their activism on tenets of the gay liberation movement. In addition to promoting the view that "Gay is Good," liberationists sought to radically transform society so that everyone's inherent bisexuality could be expressed (Altman, 1971; Epstein, 1999). A widely cited essay on gay liberation, for example, asserted that:

the reason so few of us [gay men] are bisexual is because society made such a big stink about homosexuality that we got forced into seeing ourselves as either straight or nonstraight....Gays will begin to get turned onto women when...it's something we do because we want to, and not because we should....We'll be gay until everyone has forgotten that it's an issue. Then we'll begin to be complete people. (Wittman, 1970/1972, p. 159)

In another passage, the same author compared sexuality to playing the violin and observed that "perhaps what we have called sexual 'orientation' probably just means that we have learned to play certain kinds of music well, and have not yet turned on to other music" (Wittman, 1970/1972, p. 165).

At the individual level, the liberationist framework encouraged the view that hostility toward homosexuality was very much about a heterosexual person's fear and loathing of his or her own repressed homosexual feelings. Again quoting Wittman (1970/1972), "Exclusive heterosexuality is fucked up; it is a fear of people of the same sex, it is anti-homosexual, and it is fraught with frustrations" (p. 159). Homophobia easily lent itself to the assumption that antigay hostility was based on rejecting one's own

natural homoerotic desires and could be "cured" by accepting formerly repressed aspects of one's own sexuality and gender identity. Thus, Wittman concluded his 1970 essay with a call to "Free the homosexual in everyone" (p. 171).<sup>10</sup>

Around the same time, lesbian feminists constructed an analysis that had important points of intersection with the gay liberation view. Being lesbian, they argued, was not simply a matter of sexual or romantic attraction. Rather, it involved rejection of society's compulsory heterosexuality, which was part of a patriarchal system that subjugated women. All women could be lesbians, regardless of their sexual feelings (Rich, 1980; see also Epstein, 1999; Seidman, 1993). Whereas gay liberation combined psychological and political frameworks (e.g., Altman, 1971), lesbian feminism focused mainly on the political. Indeed, some lesbian feminists explicitly rejected the notion of homophobia, arguing that it reduced social oppression to a psychological construct (Kitzinger, 1987, 1996). Despite their many other differences, gay liberation and lesbian feminism both regarded the boundary between heterosexuality and homosexuality as a cultural construction and shared the goal of breaking it down. Confronting homophobia (or heterosexism, the more common term among lesbian feminists) required a fundamental change in individual and collective consciousness about sexuality and gender.

By the late 1970s, gay liberation and separatist lesbian feminism had largely yielded to a reformist, identity-based politics that remained dominant into the twenty-first century. Rather than eradicating sexual categories or seeking to free the homosexual potential in everyone, the latter approach conceives of gay men and lesbians as comprising a more or less fixed and clearly defined minority group. The primary goal of activists became securing civil rights protections for that group (Epstein, 1999; Seidman, 1993). Today, queer theorists and activists are directly challenging the veridicality and necessity of sexual and gender categories, and some empirical research demonstrates that heterosexuality and homosexuality are not always

---

10. Weinberg (1972) acknowledged that some homophobia was based on the "secret fear of being homosexual" (p. 11), but argued that the motives for it were usually more complicated than mere reaction formation.

neatly separable, mutually exclusive categories (e.g., Diamond, 2003). However, contemporary struggles for employment nondiscrimination, parenting rights, and legal recognition of same-sex couples are still based largely on a minority group paradigm.

The view that gay and lesbian people constitute a well-defined quasi-ethnic group suggests a fundamentally different understanding of antigay hostility from that provided by the gay liberation perspective. "Within a liberationist paradigm, psychological 'homophobia' inevitably must be understood as a rejection of one's own homoerotic desires—it is a conflict of 'me versus myself.' Change requires confronting one's own sexuality" (Herek, 1985, p. 137). Within a framework of ethnic group politics, in contrast, homophobia is best understood as a rejection of members of an outgroup (similar to racism and anti-semitism). The conflict is "us versus them." Change requires challenging a heterosexual person's reactions to and misconceptions of "them" (gay men, lesbians, and sexual minorities in general), but not the validity of the categories.

Around the time that the minority group paradigm was supplanting the liberationist view, conservative opponents hostile to the gay and lesbian community's political goals were becoming better organized. Anita Bryant's 1977 crusade in Dade County, Florida, and the 1978 Briggs Initiative campaign in California were important milestones for the identity-based movement. Those confrontations—which were followed by intense political battles between pro- and antigay forces in numerous localities—marked the emergence of the conservative Christian Right as a powerful antigay force. (They also signaled the beginnings of widespread legitimization of the cause of gay rights among heterosexual liberals, but my focus here is on antigay attitudes.) Eventually, gay people and the gay community would replace communism as favorite targets for attack by U.S. religious and political conservatives (Diamond, 1995; Herman, 1997). The parallel between anticommunist and antigay ideologies is psychologically important. Both offer the individual who adheres to them a means for affirming her or his ingroup affiliations and a particular vision of the self as good and virtuous. As the Christian Right increasingly demonized gay people in the 1990s, being a "born-

again" Christian became, for many Americans who embraced it, an identity that carried with it a deep antipathy toward homosexuals. This antipathy was based mainly on commitment to a social identity rooted in allegiance to a political and religious movement.

Many Christian Right figures whose rhetoric and actions are frequently labeled homophobic have contested the term's application to them. William Dannemeyer, one of the nascent movement's strongest congressional spokesmen, once objected that the word homophobia "affirms that those who oppose the so-called normalization of homosexual behavior are motivated by *fear* rather than moral or religious principles" (Dannemeyer, 1989, p. 129, emphasis in original). Since the 1990s, an increasingly popular refrain from Christian Right and other antigay activists has been that they are not "homophobic," but are simply expressing their religious beliefs and should have their rights respected (e.g., Reed, 1996).

In a sense, their protestations have some merit. Their condemnation of homosexuality may have little to do with personal fear and much to do with their religious values and strong identification with antigay organizations. Labeling them homophobic obscures the true sources of their hostility. Thus, the evolution of antigay ideology and society's understanding of homosexuality highlights the problems inherent in relying on terminology that, taken literally, explains hostility toward sexual minorities as ultimately stemming from fear. Homophobia, based as it is on an individualistic and psychodynamic perspective, does not adequately describe modern antigay antipathy that is in the service of a self-concept rooted in religious and political convictions. Weinberg could not have anticipated these developments when he published *Society and the Healthy Homosexual*. Understanding contemporary hostility and oppression based on sexual orientation, however, requires that we recognize how antigay hostility has changed in the past 30 years and that we create new frameworks for describing, explaining, and changing it.

### Looking Forward: Beyond "Homophobia"

Homophobia has been a tremendously valuable tool for raising society's awareness about the



oppression of sexual minorities. No doubt it will continue to be useful to political activists as they challenge laws, policies, and popular attitudes that perpetuate such oppression. For scholars, however, a more nuanced vocabulary is needed to understand the psychological, social, and cultural processes that underlie that oppression. In the remainder of this article, I offer some preliminary thoughts about three general arenas in which hostility based on sexual orientation should be studied. First, such hostility exists in the form of shared knowledge that is embodied in cultural ideologies that define sexuality, demarcate social groupings based on it, and assign value to those groups and their members. Second, these ideologies are expressed through society's structure, institutions, and power relations. Third, individuals internalize these ideologies and, through their attitudes and actions, express, reinforce, and challenge them. I refer to these three aspects of antigay hostility as, respectively, sexual stigma, heterosexism, and sexual prejudice.

### ***Sexual Stigma***

Regardless of their personal attitudes, members of American society share the knowledge that homosexual acts and desires, as well as identities based on them, are widely considered bad, immature, sick, and inferior to heterosexuality. This shared knowledge constitutes stigma, a term whose English usage dates back at least to the 1300s. Deriving from the same Greek roots as the verb "to stick," that is, to pierce or tattoo, stigma originally referred to the cluster of wounds manifested by Catholic saints, corresponding to the wounds of the crucified Jesus. The holy *stigmata* were said to regularly appear or bleed in conjunction with important religious feasts.<sup>11</sup> Throughout history, stigma has commonly had negative connotations. Consistent with the word's Greek roots, it could refer literally to a visible marking on the body, usually made by a branding iron or pointed instrument. The mark could brand a slave or someone singled out for public derision because of a sin or criminal offense (e.g.,

Hester Prynne's scarlet "A"). But the mark wasn't always physical. A 1907 textbook of psychiatry described a form of psychopathology known as a Stigmata of Degeneration, for example, and the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1971) notes a reference in 1859 to the "stigmata of old maidenhood" (p. 3051).

The social psychological literature highlights five points about stigma that are relevant to the present discussion (Goffman, 1963; Jones et al., 1984; Link & Phelan, 2001). First, stigma refers to an enduring condition or attribute, a physical or figurative mark borne by an individual. Second, the attribute or mark is not inherently meaningful; meanings are attached to it through social interaction. Third, the meaning attached to the mark by the larger group or society involves a negative valuation. The attribute is understood by all to signify that its bearer is a criminal, villain, or otherwise deserving of social ostracism, infamy, shame, and condemnation. Thus, the stigmatized are not simply different from others; society judges their deviation to be discrediting. Individual members of society may vary in how they personally respond to a particular stigma, but everyone shares the knowledge that the mark is negatively valued. As Goffman (1963) pointed out in his classic analysis of stigma, both the stigmatized and the "normal" (his term for the non-stigmatized) are social *roles*, and the expectations associated with both roles are understood by all, regardless of their own status.

A fourth feature of stigma is that it engulfs the entire identity of the person who has it. Stigma does not entail social disapproval of merely one aspect of an individual, as might be the case for an annoying habit or a minor personality flaw. Rather, it trumps all other traits and qualities. Once they know about a person's stigmatized status, others respond to the individual mainly in terms of it. Finally, the roles of the stigmatized and normal are not simply complementary or symmetrical. They are differentiated by power. Stigmatized groups have less power and access to resources than do normals.

Previous authors have used *sexual stigma* (Plummer, 1975) and *erotic stigma* (Rubin, 1984) as labels for the stigma attached to male homosexuality (Plummer) and an array of sexual behaviors to which society accords low status, including sex that is

---

<sup>11</sup> The source for my comments about the etymology of stigma is the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1971).

nonprocreative, promiscuous, commercial, and public (Rubin). Similarly, in the present article sexual stigma refers to the shared knowledge of society's negative regard for any nonheterosexual behavior, identity, relationship, or community. The ultimate consequence of sexual stigma is a power differential between heterosexuals and nonheterosexuals. It expresses and perpetuates a set of hierarchical relations within society. In that hierarchy of power and status, homosexuality is devalued and considered inferior to heterosexuality. Homosexual people, their relationships, and their communities are all considered sick, immoral, criminal or, at best, less than optimal in comparison to that which is heterosexual.

Because sexual stigma is continually negotiated in social interactions, reactions to homosexuality in specific situations are not uniformly negative. Homosexual acts may be discounted if they occur in certain contexts, e.g., during adolescence, under the influence of alcohol or drugs, or in a sex-segregated institution such as a prison. A single homosexual encounter may be dismissed as experimentation. Some homosexual acts, such as participation by groups of males in homoerotic fraternity hazing rituals and "gang bangs," may be defined by the participants as male bonding or as heterosexual, not homosexual (Sanday, 1990). The degree to which sexual stigma leads to enactments of discriminatory behavior in a particular circumstance also depends on the actors involved. If the participants in an interaction are themselves gay or if they personally reject society's sexual stigma, being homosexual or having homosexual desires or experiences are not a basis for rejection, ostracism, or disempowerment in that situation.

Even if homosexuality—whether framed in terms of desires, acts, or identities—is not always a basis for ostracism, it nevertheless remains stigmatized in the contemporary United States. The default response to it is disapproval, disgust, or discriminatory behavior. Recognizing this fact, homosexual people routinely manage the extent to which others have access to information about their sexual minority status. Depending on their own feelings, heterosexual people either respond reflexively with the default or make a conscious effort to communicate their own lack of prejudice. But sexual stigma is an underlying

assumption in most social interactions.

### **Heterosexism**

If sexual stigma signifies the fact of society's antipathy toward that which is not heterosexual, *heterosexism* can be used to refer to the systems that provide the rationale and operating instructions for that antipathy. These systems include beliefs about gender, morality, and danger by which homosexuality and sexual minorities are defined as deviant, sinful, and threatening. Hostility, discrimination, and violence are thereby justified as appropriate and even necessary. Heterosexism prescribes that sexual stigma be enacted in a variety of ways, most notably through enforced invisibility of sexual minorities and, when they become visible, through overt hostility.

Use of the term heterosexism can be traced at least to 1972, coincident with Weinberg's publication of *Society and the Healthy Homosexual*. That year, heterosexism appeared in two separate letters to the editor in the July 10<sup>th</sup> edition of the Atlanta (Georgia) "underground" newspaper, *The Great Speckled Bird* ("Lesbians Respond," 1972; "Revolution Is Also Gay Consciousness," 1972).<sup>12</sup> The authors of both letters used the term to draw connections between a belief system that denigrates people based on their sexual orientation and other belief systems that make similar distinctions on the basis of race or gender, that is, racism and sexism.

As it came to be used in the 1970s and 1980s, mainly by lesbian-feminist writers, heterosexism linked anti-homosexual ideologies with oppression based on gender. In the lesbian-feminist analysis, heterosexism was inherent in patriarchy. Thus, eliminating it required a radical restructuring of the culture's gender roles and power relations (Kitzinger, 1987; Rich, 1980). Weinberg and other early popularizers of homophobia also believed that it derived from society's construction of gender. However, their theoretical orientation was more psychological, focusing on homophobia as a type of attitude toward others (or, among homosexuals, toward themselves). By contrast, writers like Kitzinger

---

12. I thank Dr. Joanne M. Despres of the Merriam Webster Company for her kind assistance with researching the origins of *heterosexism*.

and Rich argued that understanding compulsory heterosexuality and heterosexism required a fundamentally political analysis, which they believed had to be based on lesbian feminism. Thus, the word heterosexism has been closely linked to a feminist, macro-level perspective.

In common speech, heterosexism has been used inconsistently. It has often served as a synonym for homophobia. Some authors, however, have distinguished between the two constructs by using heterosexism to describe a cultural ideology manifested in society's institutions while reserving homophobia to describe individual attitudes and actions deriving from that ideology. For example, Pharr (1988) characterized heterosexism as the "systemic display of homophobia in the institutions of society" (p. 16). She argued that it "creates the climate for homophobia with its assumption that the world is and must be heterosexual and its display of power and privilege as the norm" (Pharr, 1988, p. 16; see also Neisen, 1990).

In line with these authors, I suggest that heterosexism be used to refer to the cultural ideology that perpetuates sexual stigma by denying and denigrating any nonheterosexual form of behavior, identity, relationship, or community.<sup>13</sup> Heterosexism is inherent in cultural institutions, such as language and the law, through which it expresses and perpetuates a set of hierarchical relations. In that hierarchy of power and status, everything homosexual is devalued and considered inferior to what is heterosexual. Homosexual and bisexual people, same-sex relationships, and communities of sexual minorities are kept invisible and, when acknowledged, are denigrated as sick, immoral, criminal or, at best, suboptimal.

The dichotomy between heterosexuality and homosexuality lies at the heart of heterosexism. Beginning in the early 1990s, queer theorists and other postmodernists began to refer to this core assumption as *normative heterosexuality* or *heteronormativity* (Seidman, 1997; Warner, 1993). A single definition of heteronormativity is not forthcoming in the writings of queer theorists and, as Adam (1998) noted,

13. In an earlier paper, I contrasted cultural heterosexism with psychological heterosexism (Herek, 1990). I now believe that the latter construct is better described as sexual prejudice.

characterizing heterosexuality simply as a social norm is less than adequate. Nevertheless, the term heteronormativity nicely encapsulates queer theory's critique of the cultural dichotomy that structures social relations entirely in terms of heterosexuality-homosexuality. As Adam explained:

If languages consist of binary oppositions, then heterosexuality and homosexuality are opposed terms. By constructing itself in opposition to the 'homosexual', the 'heterosexual' is rendered intrinsically anti-homosexual. For queer theory, the issue is not one of appealing for tolerance or acceptance for a quasi-ethnic, 20th century, urban community but of deconstructing the entire heterosexual-homosexual binary complex that fuels the distinction in the first place. Homophobia and heterosexism can make sense only if homosexuality makes sense. How a portion of the population is split off and constructed as 'homosexual' at all must be understood to make sense of anti-'homosexuality'. (p. 388)

If sexual stigma refers to the shared knowledge that homosexuality is denigrated, and heterosexism (subsuming heteronormativity) refers to the cultural ideology that promotes this antipathy, the task remains to account for differences among individuals in how they incorporate the antipathy into their attitudes and enact it through their actions. I have proposed *sexual prejudice* to refer to individual heterosexuals' hostility and negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians.

### ***Sexual Prejudice***

Broadly conceived, sexual prejudice refers to negative attitudes based on sexual orientation, whether their target is homosexual, bisexual, or heterosexual (Herek, 2000). Thus, it can be used to characterize not only antigay and anti-bisexual hostility, but also the negative attitudes that some members of sexual minorities hold toward heterosexuals.<sup>14</sup> Given the

14. Gay men's hostility toward lesbians, lesbians' negative attitudes toward gay men, and both groups' unfavorable reactions to bisexual women and men can also be labeled sexual prejudice. Discussion of negative attitudes among sexual minorities, however, is beyond the scope of the present article.

power relations in contemporary society, however, prejudice is most commonly directed at people who engage in homosexual behavior or label themselves gay, lesbian, or bisexual. In the present article, therefore, sexual prejudice is used to refer to heterosexuals' negative attitudes toward homosexual behavior; people who engage in homosexual behavior or who identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual; and communities of gay, lesbian, and bisexual people.

As a term, sexual prejudice has the advantage of linking hostility toward homosexuality to the extensive body of social science theory and empirical research on prejudice. Different definitions of prejudice have been proposed over the years, but most of them include three key ideas. First, prejudice is an attitude—that is, a psychological predisposition or tendency to respond to an entity with a positive or negative evaluation (e.g., Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). These evaluations occur along various dimensions such as *good-bad* and *liked-disliked*, and are based on emotional, cognitive, and behavioral information (Zanna & Rempel, 1988). Once formed, attitudes can guide an individual's future actions. Second, the attitude is held toward a social group and its members. The targets of prejudice are evaluated on the basis of their group membership, not their individual qualities. Third, prejudice typically is a negative attitude, involving, for example, hostility or dislike.

The basic definition of prejudice that can be constructed from these three components—an enduring negative attitude toward a social group and its members—is both simple and tremendously practical for framing a social psychological analysis of heterosexuals' hostility toward gay men and lesbians. In addition to suggesting an array of relevant theories and empirical research based on them, it has immediate practical value for responding to the Christian Right.

I noted above the claim by antigay activists that they are not suffering from homophobia. Strictly speaking, they are probably correct. Most of them do not have a debilitating fear of homosexuality (although they often try to evoke fear to promote their political agenda). Rather, they are hostile to gay people and gay communities, and condemn homosexual behavior as sinful, unnatural, and sick. Whereas this stance is not

necessarily a phobia, it clearly qualifies as a prejudice. It is a set of negative attitudes toward people based on their membership in the group *homosexual* or *gay* or *lesbian*. Some antigay activists will object to being called prejudiced because, they will argue, to be prejudiced is a bad thing. Personally, I regard sexual prejudice as a social evil—like prejudices based on race, religion, and gender—and believe it inflicts great costs on homosexual, bisexual, and heterosexual people alike. However, disapproval of prejudice is not inherent in its definition, and agreement about the desirability or undesirability of prejudice is not necessary to permit its systematic study (Duckitt, 1992, pp. 15ff). Rather, we need only agree that the phenomenon meets the criterion of being a negative attitude toward people based on their group membership. Regardless of one's personal judgments about homosexuality, negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians clearly fit the definition of a prejudice.

What about the use of “sex” in sexual prejudice? Isn't antigay hostility really about gender rather than sexuality? Some accounts of antigay prejudice explain it as a subset of sexism, arguing that homosexuality evokes hostility because it is equated with violation of gender norms (Kite & Whitley, 1998). Indeed, a person's sexual orientation is often inferred from the extent to which she or he conforms to gender-role expectations, with gender transgressors routinely assumed to be homosexual. Gender nonconformity is itself a target of prejudice, as demonstrated, for example, in violence against transgender individuals and boys who are perceived as “sissies” by their peers. Disentangling sexual prejudice from hostility based on gender nonconformity is a difficult task, made even more challenging by the fact that society's valuation of heterosexuality over homosexuality is intertwined with its preference for masculinity over femininity. Heterosexual masculinity is prized over both the homosexual and the feminine (Herek, 1986; Kimmel, 1997; Kitzinger, 1987; Rich, 1980).

Yet, as Gayle Rubin (1984), argued:

The system of sexual oppression cuts across other modes of social meaning, sorting out individuals and groups according to its own intrinsic dynamics. It is not reducible to, or understandable in terms of, class, race, ethnicity, or gender.

Wealth, white skin, male gender, and ethnic privileges can mitigate the effects of sexual stratification....But even the most privileged are not immune to sexual oppression. (p. 293)

To subsume sexual prejudice under gender-based prejudice is to ignore two important historical developments. The first is homosexuality's uncoupling from gender nonconformity over the past century. Early scientific conceptions of homosexuality framed it in terms of inversion or a third sex (Chauncey, 1982-1983) and gender role reversals were a hallmark of early homosexual subcultures (e.g., Weeks, 1977). During the twentieth century, however, identities and roles emerged for people whose erotic and romantic attractions were directed to the same sex but whose behavior was otherwise largely consistent with cultural gender norms. Some identities, such as the gay male clone, involved hyperconformity to gender roles (Levine, 1998). Today gay men and lesbians who violate gender rules face considerable prejudice, but so do those whose physical appearance and mannerisms are inconsistent with society's expectations about masculinity and femininity. Treating hostility based on sexual orientation as a subset of sexism can obscure the aspects of sexual prejudice that are conceptually distinct from gender ideologies.

Related to this point is a second important historical development—the already mentioned emergence of the lesbian, gay, and bisexual community as a minority group coincident with the rise of the Christian Right. With the Right's escalation of the so-called culture wars in the late twentieth century, many heterosexuals formed attitudes toward gay people (both favorable and hostile) that were psychologically similar to their attitudes toward ethnic and racial groups. Those attitudes reflected intergroup conflicts, personal loyalties, and political and religious ideologies that cannot simply be distilled to issues of gender. Thus, sexual prejudice is closely linked to beliefs about gender but ultimately it is sexual orientation that gives contemporary sexual prejudice its form. To quote Rubin (1984) again, "although sex and gender are related, they are not the same thing, and they form the basis of two distinct arenas of social practice" (p. 308).

### ***Sexual Prejudice and Antigay Behaviors***

If our ultimate concern is antigay actions, what is the point of studying sexual prejudice? An attitude is a psychological construct. Sexual prejudice, like other attitudes, is internal, inside a person's head. It cannot be directly observed. It must be inferred from overt behavior. Such behavior might consist of a verbal expression of opinion or belief, such as a response to a survey interviewer or a statement of opinion to friends. Sexual prejudice can also be inferred from a heterosexual's nonverbal behavior in the presence of a gay man or lesbian (e.g., facial expressions, rate of speech, perspiration, physical distance) and from actions such as avoiding a gay man or lesbian in a social setting, voting for an antigay ballot proposition or, at the extreme, perpetrating an act of antigay discrimination or violence. Although these behaviors can be used to infer an individual's attitude toward gay men and lesbians, they are not themselves the attitude.

During the 1950s and 1960s, many social scientists grew disillusioned by empirical studies that failed to find clear relationships between attitudes and behavior. They questioned the very validity of the attitude construct (e.g., Blumer, 1956; Wicker, 1969). Similar questions have also been raised about homophobia. Rather than examining antigay attitudes, for example, Plummer (1975) argued that empirical research should focus on human interactions in which meanings are constructed for sexual behaviors and identities, and hostility is expressed (or not expressed) toward gay men and lesbians.

The value of studies that systematically examine antigay behavior in its social context seems beyond dispute (e.g., Franklin, 1998). Yet, the constructs of attitude and prejudice are also important foci for theory and empirical research. This is because attitudes (including prejudice) can be intimately related to behavior, although social psychologists now understand the connection to be considerably more complicated than they did when Plummer (1975) published his book on sexual stigma. Attitudes can influence behavior both directly (when individuals deliberate about their intentions to act and consciously use their attitudes to inform their conduct) and indirectly (when attitudes unconsciously shape how an

individual perceives and defines a situation). Global attitudes are not particularly useful for predicting a specific act because so many other factors play a role in determining whether a behavior occurs, including characteristics of the immediate situation, social norms, the actor's ability to enact the behavior, and the actor's attitudes toward performing the behavior. However, those global attitudes are correlated with general patterns of behaviors across a variety of settings, times, and forms (Ajzen, 1989; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fazio, 1990).

Thus, sexual prejudice will not always predict specific behaviors. Whether or not a heterosexual votes for a lesbian political candidate may be influenced more by the candidate's position on taxes than by the voter's level of sexual prejudice. A heterosexual soldier's negative attitudes toward homosexuality may have little impact on his actual willingness to work with a gay peer (MacCoun, 1996). An adolescent male may participate in an antigay assault more because he needs to be accepted by his friends than because he hates gay men and lesbians (e.g., Franklin, 1998, 2000). Over time and across situations, however, heterosexuals with high levels of sexual prejudice can be expected to respond negatively to gay individuals, support antigay political candidates and policies, and discriminate against gay people considerably more often than heterosexuals who are low in sexual prejudice. Developing strategies to reduce sexual prejudice can have an impact on patterns of antigay actions over time, even though these general strategies may not always influence behavior in specific situations.

### Internalized Homophobia

As noted above, George Weinberg's original definition of homophobia encompassed the self-loathing that homosexuals themselves sometimes manifested, which he labeled "internalized homophobia" (Weinberg, 1972, p. 83). Mental health practitioners and researchers generally agree that internalized homophobia, at its root, involves negative feelings about one's own homosexuality, but they vary widely in how they conceptualize, define, and operationalize this construct (Herek, Cogan, Gillis, & Glunt, 1998; Shidlo, 1994). A detailed discussion of

internalized homophobia is beyond the scope of the present article but a few observations are relevant.

The notion that members of a stigmatized group experience psychological difficulties as a consequence of accepting society's negative evaluation of them is not unique to sexual minorities. In a classic work, Allport (1954) observed that minority group members (he focused on racial, ethnic, and religious minorities) often develop various defenses for coping with prejudice, noting that "since no one can be indifferent to the abuse and expectations of others we must anticipate that ego defensiveness will frequently be found among members of groups that are set off for ridicule, disparagement and discrimination. It could not be otherwise" (p. 143). Allport distinguished between defenses that are essentially *extropunitive*—directed at the source of discrimination—and those that are inwardly focused, or *intropunitive*. Relevant to the topic of internalized homophobia, the latter category includes the defense of identification with the dominant group, leading to self-hate which can involve "one's sense of shame for possessing the despised qualities of one's group" as well as "repugnance for other members of one's group because they 'possess' these qualities" (p. 152).

In contrast to the hostility that heterosexuals direct at homosexuals (which Malyon, 1982, called *exogenous homophobia*), internalized homophobia necessarily implicates an intrapsychic conflict between what people think they should be (i.e., heterosexual) and how they experience their own sexuality (i.e., as homosexual or bisexual). Thus, compared to exogenous homophobia (i.e., sexual prejudice), it is perhaps a better fit for the analysis of homophobia implied by the gay liberationist perspective discussed above. In the case of internalized homophobia, the best resolution for the individual does indeed seem to be to "free the homosexual" within himself or herself. Weinberg (1972) prescribed multiple strategies for accomplishing this, all based on a model of acting in accordance with the attitude one wants to adopt toward the self.

Yet, as with exogenous homophobia, it remains problematic to assume that the dominant emotion underlying internalized homophobia is fear. Allport's (1954) and Malyon's (1982) discussions highlight the importance of shame, guilt, anger, hate, and disgust

more than fear. To the extent that fear is operative, it may not have the intensity and irrational quality of a phobia.

Should internalized homophobia be called by another name, such as internalized sexual stigma, internalized heterosexism, or internalized sexual prejudice? As I have defined sexual stigma in the present article, it necessarily involves a shared knowledge about society's condemnation of sexual minorities. Regardless of their own group membership, everyone in the society internalizes stigma, that is, they comprehend the roles of the stigmatized and the "normal" whether or not they personally endorse the stratification associated with those roles. Because *internalized sexual stigma* does not obviously involve a negative attitude toward the self, it does not seem to be a useful term in this regard. *Internalized heterosexism* suggests the incorporation of an ideological system that denigrates nonheterosexuality. Such a belief system is probably necessary for the sense of dis-ease usually assumed to characterize internalized homophobia, but it does not seem sufficient to account for the strong negative emotions that are directed toward the self. *Internalized sexual prejudice* is more evocative of negative affect than the other two terms. However, it may not distinguish adequately between a sense of shame for being homosexual (i.e., negative attitudes toward the self) and hostility toward other gay and lesbian people (i.e., negative attitudes toward the members of one's group).

This brief reflection on internalized homophobia necessarily raises more questions than it answers. As with exogenous homophobia, serious consideration of the terminology used in this area has the potential value of highlighting ambiguities and gaps in our conceptualization of the phenomenon that the term purports to name.

### Conclusion: Words for the New Scholarship

More than 30 years have passed since George Weinberg first defined homophobia in his essay, "Words for the New Culture." We owe him a great debt for creating the term and helping to push society to recognize the problem of antigay hostility and oppression. Yet, it is now time for researchers and

theorists to move beyond homophobia. After three decades, the culture whose language Weinberg helped to create is no longer new. It has matured and evolved in ways not imagined in the 1960s.

In the new millennium, social and behavioral scientists are creating a scholarship that endeavors to explain hostility toward gay, lesbian, and bisexual people in its many individual and cultural manifestations. For this project to advance, we must reexamine our language and move beyond homophobia in defining the foci of our inquiry. Sexual stigma, heterosexism, sexual prejudice, and other terms we may adopt are unlikely to equal homophobia in their impact on society. What is important, however, is that the words for our new scholarship enable us to understand hostility and oppression based on sexual orientation and, ultimately, eradicate it. ♦

### Acknowledgments

I am grateful to Dr. George Weinberg and Jack Nichols, whose willingness to discuss the history of homophobia with me was invaluable in preparing this article. For their helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper, I thank Gil Herdt, Terry Stein, Theo van der Meer, Jack Dynis, and the participants in the 2004 conference, "Critical Issues in American Sexuality," sponsored by the National Sexuality Resource Center at San Francisco State University. Preparation of this article was supported in part by a Monette/Horwitz Trust Award and by resources provided by the University of California, Davis.

### References

- Adam, B.D. (1987). *The rise of a gay and lesbian movement*. Boston: Twayne Publishers.
- Adam, B.D. (1998). Theorizing homophobia. *Sexualities, 1*, 387-404.
- Ajzen, I. (1989). Attitude structure and behavior. In Anthony R. Pratkanis, Steven J. Breckler, & Anthony G. Greenwald (Eds.), *Attitude structure and function* (pp. 241-274). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Ajzen, I., & Fishbein, M. (1980). *Understanding attitudes and predicting social behavior*.

- Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Allport, G.W. (1954). *The nature of prejudice*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- Altman, D. (1971). *Homosexual: Oppression and liberation*. New York: Outerbridge & Dienstfrey.
- American Psychiatric Association. (1980). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (3rd ed.). Washington, DC: Author.
- Ayyar, R. (2002, November 1). George Weinberg: Love is conspiratorial, deviant, and magical. *Gay Today*. Retrieved February 20, 2004, from <http://www.gaytoday.com/interview/110102in.asp>
- Bayer, R. (1987). *Homosexuality and American psychiatry: The politics of diagnosis* (Rev. ed.). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Bernat, J.A., Calhoun, K.S., Adams, H.E., & Zeichner, A. (2001). Homophobia and physical aggression toward homosexual and heterosexual individuals. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 110*, 179-187.
- Blumer, H. (1956). Attitudes and the social act. *Social Problems, 4*, 59-65.
- Boswell, J. (1980). *Christianity, social tolerance, and homosexuality: Gay people in Western Europe from the beginning of the Christian era to the fourteenth century*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Boswell, J. (1993). On the use of the term "homo" as a derogatory epithet. In M. Wolinsky & K. Sherrill (Eds.), *Gays and the military: Joseph Steffan versus the United States* (pp. 49-55). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Brownworth, V. (2001, June 7). Is homophobia mental illness? *Bay Area Reporter*, p. 6.
- Buss, A.H., & Perry, M. (1992). The Aggression Questionnaire. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 63*, 452-459.
- Chauncey, G., Jr. (1982-1983). From sexual inversion to homosexuality: Medicine and the changing conceptualization of female deviance. *Salmagundi, 58-59*, 114-146.
- Churchill, W. (1967). *Homosexual behavior among males: A cross-cultural and cross-species investigation*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Clarke, L., & Nichols, J. (1969, May 23). He-man horseshit. *Screw*.
- Conger, J.J. (1975). Proceedings of the American Psychological Association, Incorporated, for the year 1974: Minutes of the annual meeting of the Council of Representatives. *American Psychologist, 30*, 620, 632-633.
- Dannemeyer, W. (1989). *Shadow in the land: Homosexuality in America*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press.
- Diamond, L.M. (2003). Was it a phase? Young women's relinquishment of lesbian/bisexual identities over a 5-year period. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology, 84*, 352-364.
- Diamond, S. (1995). *Roads to dominion: Right-wing movements and political power in the United States*. New York: Guilford.
- Duckitt, J.H. (1992). *The social psychology of prejudice*. New York: Praeger.
- Eagly, A.H., & Chaiken, S. (1993). *The psychology of attitudes*. Ft. Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Elliott, C. (1988, January 9). Hatred of homosexuals is a disease of the mind. *The Toronto Star*, p. M10.
- Epstein, S. (1999). Gay and lesbian movements in the United States: Dilemmas of identity, diversity, and political strategy. In B.D. Adam, J.W. Duyvendak, & A. Krouwel (Eds.), *The global emergence of gay and lesbian politics: National imprints of a worldwide movement* (pp. 30-90). Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Ernulf, K.E., & Innala, S.M. (1987). The relationship between affective and cognitive components of homophobic reaction. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 16*, 501-509.
- Fazio, R.H. (1990). Multiple processes by which attitudes guide behavior. In M.P. Zanna (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 23, pp. 75-109). New York: Academic Press.
- Fone, B.R. (2000). *Homophobia: A history*. New York: Metropolitan.
- Franklin, K. (1998). Unassuming motivations: Contextualizing the narratives of antigay assailants. In G.M. Herek (Ed.), *Stigma and sexual orientation: Understanding prejudice against lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals* (pp. 1-23). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Franklin, K. (2000). Antigay behaviors among young



- adults: Prevalence, patterns and motivators in a noncriminal population. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 15, 339-362.
- Fyfe, B. (1983). "Homophobia" or homosexual bias reconsidered. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 12, 549-554.
- Goffman, E. (1963). *Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Guindon, M.H., Green, A.G., & Hanna, F.J. (2003). Intolerance and psychopathology: Toward a general diagnosis for racism, sexism, and homophobia. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 73(2), 167-176.
- Haaga, D.A.F. (1991). "Homophobia"? *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality*, 6, 171-174.
- Haddock, G., Zanna, M.P., & Esses, V.M. (1993). Assessing the structure of prejudicial attitudes: The case of attitudes toward homosexuals. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 65, 1105-1118.
- Harding, C.B. (1955). Deep are the roots. *Mattachine Review*, 1(2), 4-7.
- 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. (1985). On doing, being, and not being: Prejudice and the social construction of sexuality. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 12(1), 135-151.
- 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. (1990). The context of anti-gay violence: Notes on cultural and psychological heterosexism. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 5, 316-333.
- 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). The social context of hate crimes: Notes on cultural heterosexism. In G.M. Herek & K.T. Berrill (Eds.), *Hate crimes: Confronting violence against lesbians and gay men* (pp. 89-104). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Herek, G.M. (1994). Assessing heterosexuals' 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: Theory, research, and clinical applications* (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. (2002). Gender gaps in public opinion about lesbians and gay men. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 66, 40-66.
- Herek, G.M., & Berrill, K.T. (Eds.). (1992). *Hate crimes: Confronting violence against lesbians and gay men*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Herek, G.M., & Capitanio, J.P. (1999). Sex differences in how heterosexuals think about lesbians and gay men: Evidence from survey context effects. *Journal of Sex Research*, 36, 348-360.
- Herek, G.M., Cogan, J.C., Gillis, J.R., & Glunt, E.K. (1998). Correlates of internalized homophobia in a community sample of lesbians and gay men. *Journal of the Gay and Lesbian Medical Association*, 2, 17-25.
- Herman, D. (1997). *The antigay agenda: Orthodox vision and the Christian Right*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- The homosexual: Newly visible, newly understood. (1969, October 31). *Time*, pp. 56-67.
- Johnson, N. (1993, April 19). Homophobia: It's a treatable malady. *San Francisco Examiner*, p. A17.
- Jones, E.E., Farina, A., Hastorf, A.H., Markus, H., Miller, D.T., & Scott, R.A. (1984). *Social stigma: The psychology of marked relationships*. New York: W. H. Freeman.
- Jones, M.K., & Sullivan, G. (2002). Psychiatric disorder or straight prejudice? The role of education in overcoming homophobia. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services*, 14(2), 95-105.
- Kantor, M. (1998). *Homophobia: Description, development, and dynamics of gay bashing*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- 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.
- 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: Understanding prejudice against lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals* (pp. 39-61). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Kitzinger, C. (1986). Heteropatriarchal language: The case against "homophobia." *Gossip*, (5), 15-20.
- Kitzinger, C. (1987). *The social constructionism of lesbianism*. London: Sage.
- Kitzinger, C. (1996). Speaking of oppression: Psychology, politics, and the language of power. In E.D. Rothblum & L.A. Bond (Eds.), *Preventing heterosexism and homophobia* (pp. 3-19). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Kitzinger, C., & Perkins, R. (1993). *Changing our minds: Lesbian feminism and psychology*. London: Onlywomen Press.
- Lerner, M. (1993). Curing homophobia and other conservative pathologies. *Tikkun*, 8, 5-6.
- Lesbians respond [Letter to the editor]. (1972, July 10). *The Great Speckled Bird*, p. 4.
- Levine, M.P. (1998). *Gay macho: The life and death of the homosexual clone*. New York: New York University Press.
- Levitt, E.E., & Klassen, A.D. (1974). Public attitudes toward homosexuality: Part of the 1970 national survey by the Institute for Sex Research. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 1(1), 29-43.
- Link, B.G., & Phelan, J.C. (2001). Conceptualizing stigma. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 27, 363-385.
- Logan, C.R. (1996). Homophobia? No, homophobia. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 31(3), 31-53.
- MacCoun, R.J. (1996). Sexual orientation and military cohesion: A critical review of the evidence. In G.M. Herek, J.B. Jobe, & R. Carney (Eds.), *Out in force: Sexual orientation and the military* (pp. 157-176). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- MacDonald, A.P., Jr. (1976). Homophobia: Its roots and meanings. *Homosexual Counseling Journal*, 3(1), 23-33.
- Mackie, D.M., Devos, T., & Smith, E.R. (2000). Intergroup emotions: Explaining offensive action tendencies in an intergroup context. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 79, 602-616.
- Malyon, A.K. (1982). Psychotherapeutic implications of internalized homophobia in gay men. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 7, 59-69.
- Minton, H.L. (2002). *Departing from deviance: A history of homosexual rights and emancipatory science in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Neisen, J.H. (1990). Heterosexism: Redefining homophobia for the 1990s. *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Psychotherapy*, 1(3), 21-35.
- Nichols, J. (1996). *The gay agenda: Talking back to the fundamentalists*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.
- Nichols, J. (2002). George Weinberg. In V.L. Bullough (Ed.), *Before Stonewall: Activists for gay and lesbian rights in historical context* (pp. 351-360). New York: Harrington Park Press.
- Norton, J. (1997). "Brain says you're a girl, but I think you're a sissy boy": Cultural origins of transphobia. *Journal of Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Identity*, 2, 139-164.
- Nungesser, L.G. (1983). *Homosexual acts, actors and identities*. New York: Praeger.
- Ochs, R., & Deihl, M. (1992). Moving beyond binary thinking. In W.J. Blumenfeld (Ed.), *Homophobia: How we all pay the price* (pp. 67-75). Boston: Beacon Press.
- O'Donnell, L.N., O'Donnell, C.R., Pleck, J.H., Snarey, J., & Rose, R.M. (1987). Psychosocial responses of hospital workers to Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 17, 269-285.
- Oxford English dictionary: The compact edition of the Oxford English dictionary*. (1971). Oxford, England: Clarendon Press.
- Pellegrini, A. (1992). S(h)ifting the terms of hetero/sexism: Gender, power, homophobias. In W.J. Blumenfeld (Ed.), *Homophobia: How we all pay the price* (pp. 39-56). Boston: Beacon Press.
- Pharr, S. (1988). *Homophobia: A weapon of sexism*. Inverness, CA: Chardon Press.
- Plummer, K. (1975). *Sexual stigma: An interactionist account*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

- Plummer, K. (1981). Homosexual categories: Some research problems in the labelling perspective of homosexuality. In K. Plummer (Ed.), *The making of the modern homosexual* (pp. 53-75). Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble.
- Reed, R. (1996). *Active faith: How Christians are changing the soul of American politics*. New York: Free Press.
- Revolution is also gay consciousness [Letter to the editor]. (1972, July 10). *The Great Speckled Bird*, p. 6.
- Rich, A. (1980). Compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian existence. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 5, 631-660.
- Rozin, P., Lowery, L., Imada, S., & Haidt, J. (1999). The CAD triad hypothesis: A mapping between three moral emotions (contempt, anger, disgust) and three moral codes (community, autonomy, divinity). *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 76, 574-586.
- Rubin, G.S. (1984). Thinking sex: Notes for a radical theory of the politics of sexuality. In C.S. Vance (Ed.), *Pleasure and danger: Exploring female sexuality* (pp. 267-319). Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Sanday, P.R. (1990). *Fraternity gang rape: Sex, brotherhood, and privilege on campus*. New York: New York University Press.
- Sedgwick, E.K. (1993). How to bring your kids up gay. In M. Warner (Ed.), *Fear of a queer planet: Queer politics and social theory* (pp. 69-81). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Seidman, S. (1993). Identity and politics in a "postmodern" gay culture: Some historical and conceptual notes. In M. Warner (Ed.), *Fear of a queer planet: Queer politics and social theory* (pp. 105-142). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Seidman, S. (1997). *Difference troubles: Queering social theory and sexual politics*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Shidlo, A. (1994). Internalized homophobia: Conceptual and empirical issues in measurement. In B. Greene & G.M. Herek (Eds.), *Lesbian and gay psychology: Theory, research, and clinical applications* (pp. 176-205). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Shields, S.A., & Harriman, R.E. (1984). Fear of male homosexuality: Cardiac responses of low and high homonegative males. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 10(1-2), 53-67.
- Simpson, J., & Weiner, E. (1993). *Oxford English dictionary additions series (Vol. 2)*. Oxford, England: Clarendon Press.
- Smith, E.R. (1993). Social identity and social emotions: Toward new conceptualizations of prejudice. In D.M. Mackie & D.L. Hamilton (Eds.), *Affect, cognition and stereotyping: Interactive processes in intergroup perception communication* (pp. 297-315). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.
- Van de Ven, P., Bornholt, L., & Bailey, M. (1996). Measuring cognitive, affective, and behavioral components of homophobic reaction. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 25, 155-179.
- Warner, M. (1993). Introduction. In M. Warner (Ed.), *Fear of a queer planet: Queer politics and social theory* (p. vii-xxxi). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Weeks, J. (1977). *Coming out: Homosexual politics in Britain, from the nineteenth century to the present*. London: Quartet.
- Weinberg, G. (1971, July 19). Words for the new culture. *Gay*.
- Weinberg, G. (1972). *Society and the healthy homosexual*. New York: St. Martin's.
- Wicker, A.W. (1969). Attitudes versus actions: The relationship of verbal and overt responses to attitude objects. *Journal of Social Issues*, 25(4), 41-78.
- Wittman, C. (1972). Refugees from Amerika: A gay manifesto. In J.A. McCaffrey (Ed.), *The homosexual dialectic* (pp. 157-171). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall. (Reprinted from the *San Francisco Free Press*, 1970, January 7)
- Zanna, M.P., & Rempel, J.K. (1988). Attitudes: A new look at an old concept. In D. Bar-Tal & A. Kruglanski (Eds.), *The social psychology of knowledge* (pp. 315-334). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.