

NOTES

1. Televised gay representation is still often stereotypical. "Queer eyes" are shown as predisposed to grooming, dress, and home décor. Some programming is demeaning. Half the suitors on the *Boy Meets Boy* dating game are secretly heterosexual—allegedly to show that the gay bachelor and the audience can't tell who's gay or straight. Yet it plays on the assumed discomfort, if not panic, of a straight man wooed by a homosexual.
2. When, in 2003, the Supreme Court decriminalized and dignified gay relationships in the *Lawrence v. Texas* sodomy decision and Canada legalized gay marriage, many in the United States were startled and confused about the implications for public policy and religious prerogatives. Conservatives demanded a constitutional amendment to "defend" marriage and some polls revealed a sudden backlash against homosexuality itself.

1

Homophobia and Heterosexism

Question 1: What is homophobia? Is it really a phobia?

Homophobia is the fear and hatred of homosexuality and homosexual people. It is bigotry aimed at gays, lesbians, and bisexuals for who they are and what they represent.

Homophobes target people they assume to be homosexual, but they also fear and despise any character trait or behavior that deviates from their idea of the heterosexual standard. One doesn't have to be gay to be a target of homophobia.

A real phobia is an irrational fear that leads to avoidance; but homophobia is not always irrational, and neither does a homophobe always go away. On the contrary, these haters sometimes pursue and physically attack those whose very existence upsets them. (See box 1.1.)

Question 2: Why isn't homophobia always irrational?

Sometimes homophobia is a psychological-emotional response without formal reasoning. At other times homophobia emerges as a response to a perceived problem. That doesn't mean that there are necessarily two kinds of homophobes, the emotional ones and the cerebral ones. Human attitudes and behaviors are products of both feeling and thinking.

A common notion—applied particularly to men—is that homophobia is prompted by a fear of one's own repressed homosexuality. (One provocative study found that over half the men in a homophobic group were aroused by gay erotic videos, some perhaps as a result of anxiety rather than desire.) Although it may be true occasionally that a vocal homophobe is indeed a "closet case," that explanation is simplistic and should not be generalized. (See box 1.2.)

BOX 1.1 HOMOPHOBIA PERVASIVE AND LETHAL

[T]he badly decomposed body of 16-year-old Fred Martinez Jr. was found near the sewer ponds south of Cortez. . . . "It appeared to be some sort of blunt trauma to the head. . . ." [Sheriff Joey] Chavez said. . . . Martinez often curled his hair, plucked his eyebrows, wore make-up and toted a purse at school. "People talked behind his back, but I'm sure he knew" [sophomore Jessica] Wilson said.

Aspen C. Emmett, "Suspects Questioned in Boy's Murder," *Cortez [Color] Journal*, June 28, 2001.

In October, a young man who was gay and deaf was lured from a tavern taken to a remote area of northwestern Wisconsin and savagely beaten to death, authorities say. The murder took place in a community that had just weathered a federal lawsuit over the burning of books about gays from the local high school library. One of the books, "The Drowning of Stephan Jones," is a fictionalized account of the killing of a young gay man by a group of small-town thugs. . . . [Defendant] Reed told police. [Defendant] Krulwisk and [Defendant] Walton beat Hatch to death with a tire iron. . . . [T]he three shouted that they hated gay people during the beating.

Susan Lamber Smith, "Gay Man's Murder Seems to Fit Pattern," *Wisconsin State Journal*, August 6, 2000.

BOX 1.2 SOMETIMES THE HOMOPHOBES DOES PROTEST TOO MUCH

Specialist Justin Fisher goaded Private Calvin Glover into beating Fisher's sleeping roommate (Private First Class Barry Windhell) to death with a baseball bat. What he didn't make at all clear was that he [Fisher] had gone to [a] gay club with Windhell and that he had been there before. He never mentioned that he himself had once made out with a transsexual on a downtown street corner in Nashville. He didn't mention that he liked to dress in women's lingerie. And as one witness told investigators, he certainly didn't mention that he had once started stroking Windhell's feet in the middle of the night when Windhell was sleeping.

Buzz Bissinger, "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," *Yankee*, Fall/May 2000.

BOX 1.3 REVEALING EXPERIMENT

In a completely random fashion, [researcher Dr. Richard H. Gramzow of Northeastern University] told half of the students that their "Personality Profiles had tested high on 'masculine' traits, while the other half were told they scored higher in 'feminine' traits. The result? "Male respondents who received feminine personality feedback subsequently reported extremely negative attitudes toward gay men."

E. J. Muddell, "Threat to Masculinity Pits Straight Men against Gay," *Reuters Health*, February 7, 2002.

More commonly, homophobes are distressed by those who remind them of their own insecurities about their gender role. It's not that they are worried they might be gay, but that they might not be man or woman enough. (See box 1.3.) Our culture's requirements for membership in a gender category can be quite rigid and unforgiving, particularly for men and boys. The maintenance of one's masculine "credentials" can be difficult and sometimes dangerous. So it is no surprise that males engage in a homophobic examination of themselves and other males, rejecting any qualities seen as "feminine."

The issues for women and girls, on the other hand, typically center on their physical bodies. For example, their weight, breast size, and sexual appetite are tyrannically scrutinized and self-monitored, but they are generally allowed more latitude in gender expression, dress, and same-gender intimacy than males are. Even so, girls can become suspect if they excel in traditionally male pursuits like competitive sports or if they aspire to power. Female athletes have been forced to compensate for their skills by "femming up" their appearance off the field.

Some think that both male and female heterosexuals are more negative toward homosexuals of their own gender. Being near lesbians has been known to make straight-identified women uncomfortable. If, as some psychologists believe, women are more likely than men to have a bisexual capacity, lesbians could evoke in heterosexual women a fear of what they have repressed.

In the final analysis, however, heterosexual men generally have more negative attitudes toward homosexuality than heterosexual women do.

Question 3: How is homophobia related to sexism?

One is uncomfortable with or frightened by homosexuality because it threatens one's understanding of self and society and jeopardizes one's position in the

power hierarchy of gender. Since patriarchy—the predominance of men over women—is the prevailing gender system throughout most of the world, homophobia cannot be explained without examining sexism.

Disdain for the feminine and for what is seen as feminine in men is at the root of male homophobia. Homophobic men describe themselves as less feminine and more assertive and independent than do more tolerant men. They also want others to know they conform to male norms of heterosexuality. Masculinity must be demonstrated again and again in a repeated repudiation of effeminacy/homosexuality.

Opinions about gender role are related to attitudes toward homosexuality. Both men and women who show traits that are inconsistent with cultural gender norms are assumed to be homosexual until they demonstrate otherwise. The idea that homosexuality is equivalent to gender inversion has persisted for over one hundred years. People commonly assume that self-identified gays and lesbians really want to be the “opposite” gender.

Those who uphold traditional gender roles for men and women are more homophobic than are those who accept flexible gender roles. (See box 1.4.) Victims of this homophobic code can be gay, but they can also be straight. (See box 1.5.)

Question 4: Why are straight men more homophobic toward gay men than toward lesbians?

Because gay men appear to have yielded their privilege of male domination over women, straight men see them as gender traitors. The supposedly weak homosexual man engaging in what is perceived as female behavior may feel like a slap.

Because sexist men think all women matter less, lesbians may be less threatening to them. Heterosexual men may also assume they can force homosexual women into their proper roles—hence the notion that a woman is a lesbian only until a real man has sex with her. Those images of lesbian eroticism that some

BOX 1.5 REAL MEN AREN'T GAY

A Mafia uncle told a stunned courtroom yesterday how he gunned down his mob boss—because he was gay. “Nobody’s gonna respect us if we have a gay homosexual boss sitting down discussing La Cosa Nostra business.” [Anthony Caputo told jurors in Manhattan federal court.]

[John Lehmann, “Mobster Sleeps with the Swishes,” *New York Post*, May 1, 2003.]

A lot of these kids, white and black, want music that reaffirms their masculinity. [pacific techno music star Moby] told *Spin* magazine [after being assaulted by two young men]. “I’m straight, but I love going to house-music clubs and firing with women and gay men. This is all crap, most of America seems unprepared to make.”

Christopher Muther, “Was Attack on Moby Driven by Intolerance?” *Boston Globe*, December 14, 2002.

straight men find attractive include a male voyeur stepping in to put the sexual system back in order. (See box 1.6.)

On the other hand, lesbians, who reject male dominance and claim sexual fulfillment on their own, still pose a challenge to patriarchal authority.

Overall, homophobic stigma is used to discredit both men and women who challenge traditional gender norms.

BOX 1.6 MALE HOMOPHOBIA’S DOUBLE STANDARD

Interviewer: Do you, guys, feel comfortable showing affection to your boyfriends or girlfriends when you’re out in public?

Heidi: For us, they can care less.

Daniel: The guys whistle at them, it’s a big turn-on for them. But if you’re a gay and you’re holding hands with another guy, they yell at you. Straight guys they tend to think that they’re dominant toward every body.

Calisse: They have to be macho.

Daniel: It’s like we’re going to give a bad name to them or something.

Theresa Walker, “Out in the Open,” [Interview with 4 gay teens], *Orange County Register*, May 13, 2002.

BOX 1.4 HOMOPHOBIA AS FARGE: THE PURSE DOES IT

[The *National Liberty Journal* claims] Tinky Winky has the voice of a boy but carries a purse. “He is purple—the gay-pride color, and his antennae shaped like a triangle—the gay-pride symbol.” “As a Christian, I feel that role modeling the gay lifestyle is damaging to the moral lives of children,” [editor and publisher Jerry Falwell said].

David Reed, “Falwell Calls Teletubby Gay,” *Associated Press*, February 9, 1999.

Question 5: What is heterosexism?

Heterosexism is the system under which homophobia enforces the supremacy of heterosexuality and the erasure of gay, lesbian, and bisexual experience. Racism, sexism, and anti-Semitism are also systems in which prejudice is elaborated into a social oppression. The phenomenon of heterosexual assumptions rendering non-heterosexual people invisible is called *heteronormativity*.

Question 6: Why is homophobia so extreme among adolescent males?

Adolescent boys are generally obsessed by the male role. Nothing is more worrisome to most of them than not measuring up to their peers as men. The consequence of continuous self-inspection, introspection, and comparison is considerable insecurity. And the outlet for this distress, which of course cannot be exhibited or shared, except among the most unconventional men, is to distance oneself from suspicion of "unmanliness" by reckless bravado and homophobic invective. The most powerful, and hence most common, insult among young males is *faggot*, used to police the slightest deviation from the masculine ideal. (See box 1.7.)

BOX 1.7 HOMOPHOBIA SELLS

"My words are like a dagger with a jagged edge/That'll stab you in the head/Whether you're a fag or lez/Or the homosex, hermaph, or a trans-a-ves". "Hey, it's me, Versace/W/hoops, somebody shot me/And I was just checking the mail/Get it? Checking the male!". "Slim Anus? You're damn right, slim anus/I don't get f-ked in mine/Like you two little flaming faggots". "You faggots keep egging me on/Till I have you at knifepoint/Then you beg me to stop".

Eminem lyrics in Anthony DeCurtis, "Eminem's Hate Rhymes," *Rolling Stone*, August 3, 2000.

In 1981, the [DeKalb County Ga.] school system made [former professional football player Danny Buggs] a "motivational speaker." He earns \$74,200 a year. Buggs trains "boys to become men." At a Stone Mountain High School boys-only assembly program in September [2002], Buggs [proclaimed] "God made Adam and Eve and not Adam and Steve." I hope that there are not any [epithets deleted] in here.

Cynthia Tucker, "Opinion: Let's Monvate School Board to Fire Buggs," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, November 6, 2002.

BOX 1.8 REAL JOCKS AREN'T GAY

The [Kings and Lakers] regularly trade insults, but the rhetoric heated up before Friday night's game as Lakers star Shaquille O'Neal said, "I'm not worried about the Sacramento [Queens]"

Lakers—Kings Game Marred by Fight, *Associated Press*, October 26, 2002.

The yearbook cover photo of two Millard North students wearing soap on a rope around their necks has sparked a controversy. Some view the soap on a rope as a put-down of homosexuals. The yearbook picture had been taken at a football game against Creighton Prep as a taunt to the all-male schools' team, apparently insinuating they were gay. [School district spokeswoman] Friedman said, "Most adults will not understand why this would be controversial, but students know what it symbolizes."

Tanya Eshenry, "Millard North Officials Alter Yearbook Photo," *Omaha World Herald*, May 13, 2000.

So What Is This About?

[T]he complaining student was "tea bagged," a term used by members of the football team for an initiation rite. The victim claims he was held down while one of the older team members dragged his genitals across the victim's forehead.

Bruce A. Scruton, "Five Plead Not Guilty in Hazing Incident," [Albany, N.Y.] *Times Union*, December 11, 2001.

Sometimes, the proof of one's heterosexual credentials lies in gay bashing. Often carried out in adolescent packs, these attacks are a rite of group membership and shared values. Such brutality has its origins in schoolhouse and schoolyard bullying.

Homophobia is also manifest in athletics and team sports, which have a long and profound impact on young people—particularly in toughening masculinity and controlling female autonomy. (See box 1.8.) As in the military, young men are goaded with homophobic jibes to perform acts of strength, courage, and sometimes violence.

Military specialists and some athletic coaches believe that open homosexuality damage unit cohesion. They fear the deep male bonding on which they depend could not occur without the assumption that gays have been banished. With

BOX 1.9 MILITARY HOMOPHOBIA: A FATAL TOOL

A critical moment in his decision to quit the Army, Mr. [Javier] Torres said... came when his drill sergeant unapologetically belittled a homophobic cadence in leading his platoon on a five-mile run. "Faggot, faggot down the street! Shoot him, shoot 'til he retreats."

Francis X. Clines, "For Gay Soldier, a Daily Barrage of Threats and Slurs," *New York Times*, December 12, 1999

[T]he Associated Press today withdrew a news photograph that showed misspelled graffiti—"high jack this fags"—on an airborne bomb bound for Afghanistan. The photograph, taken on the USS Enterprise, shows a Navy officer scrawling a message on a bomb attached to the wing of an attack plane.

Navy Photo Shows Anti-gay Slurs on Bomb Plane. www.planeout.com, October 12, 2001

rampant homophobia, they get both hypermasculine competitors and manly attachments without suspicion. (See box 1.9.)

Question 7: What about religious proscriptions against homosexuality?

Over the centuries, powerful people have used the Bible to justify oppression against out-groups, be they blacks, Jews, Catholics, or Protestants. Similarly, fundamentalist interpretations of Jewish and Christian Bibles have been employed to condemn homosexual behavior, if not homosexuals. Some religious conservatives believe that to alter their churches' antigay doctrine would be to destroy the church itself. Others merely use the Bible as a cover for their bigotry—the adulous three-times-divorced politician, for example, who claims gay marriage would defy God's will.

On the other hand, less homophobic people of faith often belong to liberal denominations that have come to accept and even affirm gays, lesbians, and bisexuals.

Question 8: Are some racial, ethnic, and class groups more homophobic than others?

There are prejudiced people in all demographic groups, although the reasons for heterosexism may vary in degree from group to group. Groups tend to be more

BOX 1.10 SCRATCH A LIBERAL

The gay bogeyman or woman can still be exploited by demagogues with impunity... And it's not just those on the right who succumb to ignorance and fear on this subject: only a few weeks ago my wife and I were lectured by a prominent figure in Manhattan's liberal literary establishment about a conspiracy to recruit our children into homosexuality at college.

Frank Rich, "JOURNAL: Summer of Matthew Shepard," *New York Times*, July 3, 1999

homophobic when they are also:

- patriarchal and rigid about gender roles;
- politically conservative;
- religiously orthodox;
- focused on marriage and procreation; and
- less exposed to higher education.

Well-educated agnostics can also be intolerant of homosexuality. Genteel homophobes are often just more skilled at disguising their homophobia under a veneer of civility than less sophisticated folks are. Moreover, it is often easier for self-styled liberals to accept homosexuality in the abstract or in other people's families than in their own. (See box 1.10.) A key to understanding homophobia in all groups and cultures is the degree to which the equality of women is accepted.

Question 9: Has homophobia always existed?

Before we consider homophobia historically, we need to understand that there have not always been "homosexuals" in the world. As far as we know, there have always been people who are sexually attracted to others of their own gender, but such people were probably not regarded as an identity group until the late nineteenth century.

As far back at least as ancient Greece and the early Roman Empire, men were permitted to have erotic ties with other men without drawing attention to themselves as another type of human being. All adult male citizens were free to penetrate whomever they desired so long as the passive partner was a woman, a slave, or a boy. The issue in this kind of arrangement was power, not gender. That is, the more powerful were expected to dominate the less powerful.

The power system was disrupted if an adult male citizen allowed himself to be sexually dominated. He might be scorned or parodied but not classified by (or investigated for the cause of) his atypical behavior. There is no evidence that he or anyone else thought his erotic proclivities gave him a group identity.

What a woman did with another woman was not very important as long as she obliged her man. The boy, for his part, was assumed to be in a mentored relationship with his older male partner. He was thought to derive power but not pleasure from the receipt of semen. And at a certain age he was expected to end the practice and marry a woman.

Hindu texts, Tantric rituals, and religious statues provide historic examples of same-gender male and female sexual relations in Indian cultures. Descriptions of "fashionable male-with-male sex" can be found in Chinese accounts from the late Ming period. In certain aboriginal cultures, like the Sambia of New Guinea, males engage, even today, in ritualized homosexual activities and initiation rites. A boy is expected to be sexually intimate with other boys until marriage to a woman or women. All these practices and the characterizations of them defy our familiar Western identity categories of gay, straight, and bisexual. (See box 1.1.1.)

With later Christianity came the notion of sodomitical sin. Even then, however, the sodomite was not classified according to the specific sexual sin he committed, be it with his male servant or his sheep—or his wife or some other woman for that matter. Sodomy, adultery, and fornication were all sinful, but so were avarice and anger.

Eventually, the sodomy that the clergy condemned became the domain of the criminologist and the physician. The inclination toward same-gender intimacy was pathologized and its so-called sufferers were criminalized as a new class of

people, first called *inverts* and later *homosexuals* and *lesbians*. The causes of sexual deviation were investigated and cures were imposed.

Although there is some disagreement among historians about possible earlier examples of homosexual subcultures, all agree that by the middle of the 1800s, many people who were sexually interested in members of their own gender were discovering one another in growing cities.

Question 10: *What caused this change from a kind of sin to a type of person?*

The development of these ostensibly scientific categories and the invention of the idea of identities based on sexuality coincided with important economic changes. Industrialization, during which many people left family farms for cities, permitted them to pay more attention to nonprocreative desires and to consider new sexual arrangements in relative anonymity. Thus, a subculture arose as a consequence of sexual tastes.

Still, one has to wonder if these sexual activities would have provoked the level of scrutiny they did, were it not for the rise of the women's movement. The threat that independent women posed to the patriarchal order may have contributed, along with the ascendancy of science over faith, to this sudden fascination with gender/sexual deviance. Indeed, early psychologists like Krafft-Ebbing equated gender role rebellion with lesbianism.

Other ways in which male and female inverts were diagnosed offer clues to the biases of the scientists. Lesbians were described as overtly sexed, coarse, and masculine. Women's colleges, a new phenomenon, were suspected of breeding lesbianism. Male inverts were thought to have female souls or to lack male hormones. Freudians later claimed such men were victims of smothering mothers and weak or absent fathers.

To Freud himself homosexual desire, either unconscious or conscious, is inherent in everyone. He did consider exclusive homoeroticism inferior to heterosexual, yet he felt it was nothing to be ashamed of and objected to jailing homosexuals and keeping them out of the psychiatric profession. Still, some of his successors believe gay men are feminized, retarded at the Oedipal stage, afraid of women, and craving father substitutes as sexual partners.

The cures some professedly compassionate doctors offered, and often imposed, included everything from bicycling and primal screaming to castration, cliterodectomy, and lobotomy. (See box 1.1.2.)

Question 11: *What does this history prove about homophobia?*

Same gender sexual desires and acts have had different meanings over time and in different places. Various cultures have interpreted what we call homosexuality

BOX 1.1.1 LABELS APPLY, OR DO THEY?

British marines returning from an operation deep in the Afghan mountains spotted last night an alarming new threat, James Fletcher said. They were more terrifying than the al-Qaeda. One bloke who had painted toenails was offering to paint ours. They got about hand in hand, miming around the village. . . . We were pretty shocked. . . . We discovered from the Afghan soldiers we had with us that a lot of men in this country have the same philosophy as ancient Greeks: a woman for babies, a man for pleasure.

Chris Stephen, "Started Making Fine Afghan Men All Made Up to See Them," *The Scotsman* [Edinburgh] May 24, 2002.

BOX 1.12 THE TORTURE CONTINUES

A leading psychiatrist has described how the recently created 24-year-old man for sexual orientation. The son of an army sergeant sought treatment because he wanted to have a conventional marriage and children. Another man recently revealed his experience of such therapy during the 1960s. More than 700 people have since said they had received similar treatment. I was locked up alone in a mental institution for 72 hours with supposedly gay pornography and given drugs to make me vomit and become incontinent, he said. There was no lavatory and no water supply in the room. They said the next part was to apply electrodes to my genitals.

Lois Rogers, "Gay Cure Therapy Offered on NHS," *London [UK] Times*, June 20, 1999.

in many ways and they still do around the world. The way societies give meaning to different aspects of a person's makeup (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation) is called the social construction of identity. Having a particular skin pigment, for example, has had different identity consequences over the centuries on different continents.

In short, the significance of what we call *homosexuality* is determined by the culture. It is not a universal and timeless given, despite Justice Burger's 1986 opinion in *Bowers v. Hardwick* that it has been condemned through "millennia of moral teaching." The majority opinion in *Lawrence v. Texas* in 2003, explicitly overruling *Bowers*, cites gay studies scholarship as evidence that same-gender sexual relations have been understood and judged differently over centuries.

Question 12: Does that mean that homosexuality could go back to being a neutral characteristic, without any meaning for one's identity?

Theoretically, yes. If homophobes stopped fearing and persecuting people because of their homosexuality, then all sexuality categories could lose their significance. We would be no more likely to group ourselves according to the gender of our erotic partners than we would form into groups of redheads or broccoli lovers.

But in the real world, we must concede that gays, lesbians, and bisexuals—at least in Western societies—have already developed a common history and culture, probably as a result of being stigmatized and persecuted, that will not soon become irrelevant to their sense of themselves or others' sense of them. Racism too, even

if it were to evaporate tomorrow, has forged ties and identities based on common oppression and cultural survival that would not likely become meaningless in the short term.

Question 13: Can't these minority identities trap people into "types" at the expense of their individuality?

Yes, labels like *gay* and *lesbian* can homogenize individuals. Moreover, stereotyping by straight people is not the only danger. Coming out into a homosexual identity is an act of liberation from debilitating stigma, but it can also produce a culture with stifling "rules" for belonging. Like other minorities, gays and lesbians sometimes enforce their own members' conformity to group norms. It's understandable that solidarity is important to oppressed groups, but it is not acceptable to violate individual autonomy in the name of a united front.

Some cutting edge theorists have even urged their fellow homosexuals to discard gay labels as outdated. Some prefer to form political communities focused on economic injustice, which they see as the overriding oppression worldwide.

There may indeed come a time when sexuality preferences will seem an irrelevant basis for community formation, but we are not there yet. As irksome as it may be to define oneself and organize collectively in reaction to homophobia, there is no alternative except in theory. The relationship between heterosexual patriarchy and many of the world's ills is still quite real.

Question 14: What is internalized homophobia?

Internalized homophobia is a variety of self-loathing. Nearly all homosexual people are to some degree subject to this deep shame, but it is not inborn—it is instilled through one's relationships and other learning experiences. It takes root or withers, depending on one's psychological needs and capacity to resist. It can also be influenced by external factors such as race, class, ethnicity, religion, geography, family tolerance, and family psychologies.

Internalized homophobia can cause depression and low self-esteem as well as other psychological and cognitive difficulties. (See box 1.13.) On the other hand, coming out is a step toward healthy adjustment. (See chapter 3.)

Even those who appear to accept themselves may harbor an unrecognized sense of inferiority that leads to self-sabotage and acquiescence to second-class status. When stigmatized people blame themselves for their problems, their self-esteem is ultimately diminished.

Because it can be subtle, internalized homophobia requires long-term vigilance. The struggle is between two internal scripts: the shameful "I am bad, wrong, sinful

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