Rethinking “Homophobia”: Sexual Prejudice Today

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Homophobia Defined

- First proposed by Weinberg (1972) to define a **fear** or **hatred** of homosexual individuals – emerged in response to Gay Liberation movement in the 1960s.

- Prior to 1970s, academic discussion surrounding non-heterosexual behaviour or relationships legitimised negative societal attitudes towards ‘sick’, ‘unhealthy’ and ‘sinful’ homosexuality.

- Today, homophobia encompasses a large pool of (not particularly consistent) language describing anti-gay ideologies, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours.
## Homophobia Defined

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weinberg</td>
<td>1960’s</td>
<td>Heterosexual people’s fear, contempt and hatred of LGB people.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weinberg</td>
<td>1972</td>
<td>Heterosexual person’s irrational fear and dread of being in close contact/quarters with LGB persons</td>
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<tr>
<td>Macdonald</td>
<td>1976</td>
<td>An irrational persistent fear and dread of homosexuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morin &amp; Garfinkle</td>
<td>1978</td>
<td>An individual's irrational fear, as well as a cultural belief system that supports negative stereotypes about gay people</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hudson &amp; Ricketts</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>A uni-dimensional construct composed of several emotional responses (e.g. fear, anger, disgust) that persons experience while interacting with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) individuals</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fyfe</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>Consists of negative attitudes, culture bound commitments to traditional sex roles and personality traits</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brittin</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Fear and dislike of lesbians and gay men</td>
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*Reproduced from Smith, Oades & McCarthy (2012)*
# Homophobia Defined

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<tr>
<td>Adams et al.</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>A construct that consists of negative attitudes, affect regulation and malevolence towards lesbians and gay men</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sears</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>The prejudice, discrimination, harassment or acts of violence against sexual minorities, including lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgendered persons, evidenced in a deep-seated fear or hatred of those who love and sexually desire those of the same sex.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Negative attitudes toward lesbian, gay and (sometimes) bisexual people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herek</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>The marginalisation and disenfranchisement of lesbians and gay men.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kritzinger</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>One way in which strict adherence to gender role stereotypes is enforced and gender oppression maintained</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herek</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Refers to individual’s beliefs and behaviours emanating from personal ideology. Individual or social ignorance or fear of gay and/or lesbian people. Homophobic actions can include prejudice, discrimination, harassment, and acts of violence and hatred.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Definitions were obtained from a literature search which yielded 19 articles in 13 different journals with key words of ‘homophobia and heterosexism’*

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Limitations of “Homophobia”

- Fails to take into account more subtle forms of sexual identity prejudice/discrimination (i.e., forced invisibility and marginalization)

- Focusing on ‘fear’ or ‘hatred’ not conducive to an analysis of the more complex systems in place that prioritise and normalise heterosexuality (Herek, 2000)

- Can’t distinguish between systemic ideologies/belief systems, individual attitudes and assumptions, and systematic or interpersonal discrimination
Rethinking “Homophobia”

- Having the correct language to conceptualize sexual prejudice will allow us to:
  
  a) Move beyond assessing explicitly negative attitudes and practices
  
  b) Conduct a more comprehensive investigation of the highly nuanced nature of sexual identity discrimination
  
  c) Potentially make an important step towards the normalization (rather than tolerance) of same-sex attraction
Rethinking “Homophobia”

Herek (2004), Rahman & Jackson (2010), Smith, Oades & McCarthy, 2012) – systemic ideologies distinct from individual prejudice and discrimination

Propose a sort of three-tier model that delineates clearly between the system, the prejudice and the discrimination

Systemic anti-homosexual belief systems and ideologies → Individual prejudice (i.e., anti-homosexual attitudes) → Discriminatory practices and behaviours
Heterosexism

- Refers to the widespread systemic oppression of non-heterosexual individuals

- Encompasses the myriad of socio-cultural, legal and constitutional practices that “denies, denigrates and stigmatizes” non-heterosexual behaviour, individuals and relationships (Herek, 1990)

- Result of a number of historical and present-day phenomena that each serve to reinforce the essentialist notion that sexuality is a genetic/biological, binary construct (Rahman & Jackson, 2010)
(Western) Heterosexism

- Judeo-Christian Condemnation (c. 1300s)
- Medicalisation/Pathologising of Homosexuality
- “Unnatural Laws” and the criminalisation of same-sex behaviour

Essentialist theories of sexuality (evolutionary/biopsychological approaches)
AIDS epidemic
SOME gay liberations arguments
In other words, heterosexism refers to the generalized belief that sexual orientation can be easily and cleanly divided into “Heterosexual” (natural, expected, healthy) and “Homosexual” (deviant, abnormal, wrong).
In other words, heterosexism refers to the generalized belief that sexual orientation can be easily divided into two stable categories: “Heterosexual” (natural, expected, healthy) and “Homosexual” (deviant, abnormal, wrong).
Non-Essentialist Approaches

- Sexuality considered a dynamic, multi-variable process, involving:
  - Attraction
  - Behavior
  - Fantasies
  - Emotional and social preferences
  - Self-identification
  - Lifestyle

- Not a universal or natural phenomenon that is the same across time and space

- Argued to have no shape or meaning outside of a “socio historical container of meaning and regulation” (Tiefer, 2004, p.12)
Anti-Gay Discrimination

- Difficult to get an accurate picture of discrimination when still bound by traditional conceptualisation of anti-gay prejudice

- Typically considered in terms of overt hostile harassment or physical violence (e.g., Bernat et al., 2001) or more subtle (but still explicit) slurs, snubs and jokes (e.g., Silverschanz et al., 2008)

- More progressive account needed in order to fully understand the experiences of GLBTIQ individuals in a modern context

- Excludes more nuanced forms of marginalization (e.g., forced invisibility) and wider issues related to “straight privilege”
Anti-Gay Discrimination: Straight Privilege

- Set of unearned advantages that exist because of the way society is constructed and the way certain messages of a set group of people are portrayed - Others are oppressed as a result

- Straight Privilege Checklist (from McIntosh, 1989).

- Includes items such as:
  - “I can be pretty sure that my roommates, hall-mates and classmates will be comfortable with my sexual orientation.”
  - “People of my gender do not try to convince me to change my sexual orientation.”
  - “I am not identified by my sexual orientation.”
  - “If I pick up a magazine, watch TV, or play music, I can be certain my sexual orientation will be represented.”
EU LGBT Survey (2013)

- Most recent wide scale survey conducted at European level investigated the subjective experiences of non-heterosexual individuals

- Assessed direct forms of discrimination experienced in previous 12 months, including:
  a) Overt harassment/violence
  b) Discrimination in work and education
  c) Victimisation in daily life

- Approx half (48%) of respondents were not open about their sexual identity outside of their close family/friends, and just 21% classed themselves as “fully open”
Figure 1: Respondents who felt discriminated against or harassed in the last 12 months on the grounds of sexual orientation, by country and by LGBT subgroup (%)

Question C2: In the last 12 months, in the country where you live, have you personally felt discriminated against or harassed on the basis of one of more of the following grounds? Answer: C. Sexual orientation. Base: All EU LGBT survey respondents.
EU LGBT Survey 2013

Based on their LGBT identification:

• 18% of Irish respondents said they felt personally discriminated against when looking for a job

• 35% felt discriminated against in areas other than employment

• 81% of all respondents said that casual jokes about LGBT people in everyday life were widespread

• 93% reported some degree of negative comments or conduct in school setting
Modern Anti-Gay “Attitudes”

- Research suggests moving away from more traditional disgust-based attitudes and towards a more complex/intellectualized set of anti-gay beliefs (see Morrison & Morrison, 2009)

- May be product of more generalized essentialist beliefs concerning gender and sexuality – in this regard, non-heterosexual relationships pose threat to “natural” social order of men and women

- Thus, very difficult to assess empirically, especially when relying on self-report measures (i.e., questionnaires/surveys)
Prejudice: The Role of Language

- One largely understudied factor in prejudice is the role of language in maintaining (and potentially mediating) cultural heterosexism and discrimination.

- **Relational Frame Theory** (Hayes, Barnes-Holmes & Roche, 2001) provides one theoretical framework for functionally analyzing the role of language in this process.

- Shares common underlying assumptions with other contextualistic accounts of human behaviour (e.g., social constructionism, etc.).
Functional Approach: Language as Mediator

Systemic anti-homosexual belief systems and ideologies

Verbal practices (i.e., forms of verbal categorization and linguistic stereotypes)

Discriminatory practices and behaviours

May allow for a more dynamic and conceptually valid interpretation of sexual identity discrimination, as well as enabling more focused empirical assessment.
Investigating verbal practices directly may enable a more accurate assessment of verbal behaviour than standard explicit measures.

Number of measures have been developed from within a functional approach in recent decades, in which attitudes are conceived as networks of stimulus relations established and maintained by the verbal community (i.e. a culture).

One such measure is the behaviour-analytic test methodology known as the Function Acquisition Speed Test (FAST; O’Reilly et al., 2012).
The Function Acquisition Speed Test (FAST)

- The FAST assesses whether the ability to form a new equivalence class comprised of gay and evaluative stimuli (i.e., good/bad, natural/unnatural) will be impacted by an individual's pre-existing verbal construction of “gay”

- Was built on the findings that:
  a) Previous verbal practices of relating stimuli may interfere with your ability to form new equivalence relations (i.e., gay-natural)
  b) Behaviour that has been consistently reinforced in an individual’s social history may be resistant to change, even when the reinforcement contingencies are modified
The FAST Methodology

- The FAST uses 4 stimuli, or sets thereof.

- In each trial, a single stimulus is displayed.

- Each trial has a response window of 3 seconds.

- The participant must learn (via corrective feedback) whether to press left or right in response to each stimulus.

- Pairs of stimuli share a response key (i.e., form a functional response class).

- The functional classes trained are juxtaposed across two critical blocks of the test, which together index the strength of the target A-B relation.

  - **Consistent block:** shared response function is reinforced ACROSS the two categories of interest.

  - **Inconsistent block:** shared response function is reinforced BETWEEN each of the two the target categories and each of two additional neutral categories.

- Each block continues until a participant can produce 10 correct responses in a row.
The typical FAST consists of four phases, as well as a short practice phase to familiarise participants with the procedure:

1. Baseline 1
2. Consistent Block
3. Inconsistent Block
4. Baseline 2

Two baseline blocks provide a baseline level of functional response class formation against which the acquisition rates across the two target categories can be compared.

Presented in a randomized order.
FAST: Scoring Procedure

- Core metric of the FAST is **response accuracy**

- The number of trials required for the subject to reach a preset fluency criterion in each block of trials (10 successive correct responses) should represent an index of the pre-existing strength of the relation between the target categories.

- **DIFFERENCE** in trials to acquisition when stimuli suspected of being related share a response function as opposed to not sharing a response function indexes the strength of the relation.

- Can be adjusted by baseline scores - which index acquisition speed on neutral task.
FAST: Scoring Procedure

Acquisition Rates when stimuli DO share a function

Difference in acquisition rates

Acquisition Rates when stimuli DO NOT share a function

Baseline Acquisition Rates

(Can be used to inform the acquisition rate differential)
The FAST for Anti-Gay Bias

- In this way, the FAST may provide a quick, valid and reliable assessment of verbal histories.

- That is, it may enable a functional and comprehensive assessment into the complex and nuanced nature of modern anti-gay prejudice, by allowing us to:
  
  a) Investigate the relationship between cultural ideals and verbal relations between stimuli.
  
  b) Understand the connection between these linguistic relations (i.e., gay-unnatural) and prejudicial behaviours.