

WILLIAMS, Walter L (Southern California) REDUCING HETEROSEXISM BY GAY  
ACTIVIST ANTHROPOLOGISTS ENGAGING THE PUBLIC, 1970s-1990s.

While anthropologists can engage the public indirectly through teaching students and scholarly publications, anthropologists can also have a more direct public engagement.

This paper will argue that anthropologists doing research bearing upon any form of prejudice especially need to engage the public to challenge discrimination. Those doing research on same-sex love have a particular opportunity, and responsibility, to use their expertise to reduce the high levels of heterosexist and homophobic prejudice in society.

Anthropologists have a responsibility to bring their research to a mass audience by writing books for a wider readership, as well as in mass market publications and films.

The author will use his own experience growing out of his best-selling book *THE SPIRIT AND THE FLESH: SEXUAL DIVERSITY IN AMERICAN INDIAN CULTURE*, to show ways in which anthropological texts can have a social impact. He will offer means for anthropologists to engage the public by writing in popular print media, participating in filmmaking and television production, speaking to public groups, and designing museum exhibitions. The author will give examples from his role in ONE Institute International Gay and Lesbian Archives. He will also examine his experience as an expert witness in court cases involving anti-gay prejudice. Another way to engage a wider public is through an impact on other academic disciplines and by doing interdisciplinary work.

The author will discuss his role as founder and editor of the interdisciplinary publication, *INTERNATIONAL GAY AND LESBIAN REVIEW* (<http://www.oneigla.org>), and his efforts to publicize academic and non-academic books to a wider audience through internet publication.

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“Out in the World:  
Lesbian and Gay Anthropologists Engage the Public”

REDUCING HETEROSEXISM BY GAY ACTIVIST ANTHROPOLOGISTS

ENGAGING THE PUBLIC, 1970S-1990S.

by

Walter L. Williams

Gay and lesbian anthropologists have had a tremendous impact within the last three decades. First they have had an impact on their students, second on the anthropological discipline, and third on the general public. While the first two areas of impact have been the main focus of most gay and lesbian anthropologists in the last three decades, I will argue in this paper that it is time for us to shift emphasis to the third area: engaging the public. This is not to detract in any way from the importance of the accomplishments in the first two areas. Indeed, the impact of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered academics, in becoming open and coming out of the closet to their students and colleagues, has underlain much of the progress in gay liberation since 1970.

By our teaching, we can have an important influence on our students. That is why we in particular must pay attention to being excellent teachers for our students. When

students have taken my class, for so many of them in the past, it was the first opportunity they had ever had to meet an openly gay person. That is changing, thankfully, as more and more people come out openly. However, even for those students who have known a gay person, it is important for them to see proud and open gay people in positions of authority.

I sometimes think I have more impact on reducing homophobia by being an effective teacher in the course I teach on American Indians than in my gay studies courses where the students who sign up for such courses already have a more accepting attitude. Many students who sign up for a class on Native Americans may be surprised to discover that many of those cultures were accepting of sexual and gender diversity. By being exposed to such an unexpected topic, they may be more affected than others. Especially if they like me as a teacher and as a human being, that further challenges their prejudices. Given this reality, it is doubly important for universities to hire a diverse faculty and to encourage their racial and sexual minority professors to be especially good teachers. It is difficult for students to maintain their prejudices when confronted with professors from the stigmatized groups whom they admire as teachers. This is the real reason that conservative bigots so severely resisted the idea of openly lesbian and gay teachers, because they did not want young students to see such persons contributing to society in an admirable role. Because so many lesbian and gay anthropologists have come out publicly in their universities, that action in and of itself has resulted in major change.

Similarly, by taking an active role in challenging heterosexism and homophobia within the American Anthropological Association, pioneers of the Anthropological Research Group on Homosexuality (now the Society of Lesbian and Gay Anthropologists), like Clark Taylor, Joe Carrier, Stephen Murray, and others paid the

price by not being hired in faculty positions. It has been a long hard struggle to get the discipline to recognize and address the heterosexist discrimination in the anthropological profession, as can be attested by the valuable work of pioneers like Esther Newton, Kenneth Read, Larry Gross, Paul Kutsche, Evelyn Blackwood, Bill Leap, Ellen Lewin, and many others. None of us should forget their hard work that has benefited all of us, and we should never pass up an opportunity to offer deepest appreciation to each of them.

By publishing academic books and writing articles in anthropological journals about sexual diversity, GLBT anthropologists have also had a major impact on the discipline. Who can doubt the huge influence of the many publications by Gilbert Herdt on Melanesia and youth, or Esther Newton on drag queens and butch lesbians. Every time an academic publication appears on sexual variance, we take one more step toward the acceptance of such variance by other anthropologists. We are now seeing this research being incorporated into new textbooks for introductory anthropology courses, and into the lectures of our colleagues.

However, without in any way detracting from the importance of our teaching and academic scholarship, let me suggest that we also need to be doing a better job in reaching the wider public. Ellen Lewin invited me to address this topic by focusing on the public impact of my best-selling book The Spirit and the Flesh: Sexual Diversity in American Indian Culture. This book has certainly had more impact than all my other seven books put together. I want to talk about the various ways my research has engaged the public, not to highlight my own contributions, but hopefully as a model that others might use to establish more public impact of their own work. I get great joy in inspiring others to surpass my successes. It is in that mindset that I offer these suggestions for you today.

Why I wrote The Spirit and the Flesh the way I did has to do with my basic reasons for becoming an anthropologist. I had never had any exposure to anthropology in high school, but when I got to college I immediately took two courses on American Indians in order to learn more about the Cherokee side of my family. Remembering childhood visits with my Cherokee great, great grandmother, and time spent as a child on the Eastern Cherokee reservation, eventually led me to do research on that reservation while I was in graduate school. This led directly to the publication of my first book, Southeastern Indians Since the Removal Era (Williams 1979).

As I took more courses on anthropology as an undergraduate in the 1960s, my interests expanded to a study of other cultures in general. What literally blew me away was the different perspective I gained on my own American culture by knowing about contrasting values in other cultures. This tied in with my developing social activism. I was definitely a child of the 1960s, and I grew up in Atlanta, a hotbed of the civil rights movement. My activism sometimes endangered my own life, and I am ashamed that my youthful rashness even endangered the safety of my parents and my little sister. Nevertheless, I consider it a great benefit that while still an undergraduate my activism put me in position to meet Martin Luther King, Jesse Jackson, Julian Bond, and other leading activists. Though I just did little things with them, like operate mimeograph machines, deliver messages, and get coffee, being around these activists was a major inspiration for me. I carried picket signs in demonstrations, engaged in lobbying efforts to break down segregation, and wrote journalistic articles on black contributions to Georgia's culture. I was influenced by Martin Luther King to add opposition to the Vietnam war to my developing activism.

Because I considered what I was learning in my anthropology classes to be so important, I incorporated it into my social activism. This anthropological influence became even more direct in the 1970s, when I got caught up in activist support of the American Indian Movement. I also admired feminist activists, who were having an influence on academia at the same time, and was especially inspired by feminist notions that “the personal is political.” By the late 1970s, when I came out of the closet and got involved in public gay liberation, my pattern of dual involvement in academia and activism was set. Thus, from the very beginnings my conception of anthropology was shaped within a context of its potential to produce social change. I was committed to using knowledge of other cultures to help change our own society.

How I defined “our own” society included modern Native Americans. When I did the fieldwork for my study of Native Two Spirit people, and learned from traditionalist Indians about the high respect for such androgynous persons, I saw how valuable this knowledge could be. So many young Native Americans had never heard of such respectful traditions, and experienced the same kind of heterosexist and homophobic prejudice that non-Indians experienced. They were the primary audience for which I wrote The Spirit and the Flesh. I knew that the extent to which I could reach them, and Indian people in general, this book would be able to have a decided impact on real people’s lives.

The second most important audience I had in mind was the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered community in general. The vast majority of GLBT people are raised in non-gay households, and many of us have experienced extreme homophobia from our own families. Many of us have been raised with religious values that labeled homosexual behavior as sinful. Much research has shown the impact of prejudice on children growing

up in racial or ethnic minority families. But at least most of those children had parents and other relatives who countered such societal messages by psychologically-strengthening family bonding, role modeling, and ethnic self-valuing traditions. In contrast, many of us were raised in families with no role models, no validating traditions, but only invisibility, secrecy, and shame. It is impossible to grow up in such a culture without absorbing internalized homophobia.

Before I did this research, I think I could have conceived of a religion that was non-judgmental toward homosexuality. But I never would have been able to conceive of a religion that sanctified androgynous people and celebrated same-sex marriages. When I learned the deep respect for androgynous people in Native American religions, to the point that such persons were often considered to be sacred people, and were often turned to for spiritual advice and leadership, it reordered my entire conceptions of the relationship between sexuality and spirituality. My sexuality was transformed from a liability to an asset, from a secret shame to a struggle for human rights. It led me to reconceive the very nature of freedom, with the idea that the freedom to love is no less important an individual liberty than traditionally cherished freedoms of speech, press, assembly, and religion. All are equally important aspects of intimate actions in speech, thought and behavior, all of which are seen as the birthright for each person to be able to choose to follow what kind of life that person wishes. Those of us who have had a part in the Gay and Lesbian liberation movement can take pride in the fact that we have added this additional component to the pantheon of human rights as humanity enters the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

As I was writing The Spirit and the Flesh I knew that if I wrote the book for these two audiences I would also reach non-gay people. I hoped it would influence the families

and friends of modern Two Spirit Native people, as well as the families and friends of non-Indian GLBT people. Writing this book was never an either/or choice for these two audiences. However, I had to make a definite decision about whether to write this as a book primarily for an academic audience or a wider audience. All my previous articles since getting my Ph.D. had been published in academic journals, and my three previous books had been published by university presses. I had gained early tenure in my job at the University of Cincinnati, but I had moved to California in 1984 and accepted an untenured associate professorship at the University of Southern California. I remember quite distinctly, as I sat typing on my computer, that this subject was too important to restrict it solely to an academic audience. As I thought about my upcoming tenure decision, tears came to my eyes as I realized the words I was typing were directed toward my intended audiences rather than toward a tenure committee at USC. When Beacon Press excitedly pledged to market this book as one of their top publications for the year, I decided to go with them rather than a university press. I paid the price for this decision, because some professors at USC dismissed my manuscript as not being “objective scholarship.” In fact, some of you know that I almost lost my job over this book. In this 1986 tenure decision, where I had published four books and many academic articles, it was not a case of “publish or perish” but “publish and perish.” It was only after the book was published, and it had won three book awards, that the University Provost reversed the decision of the Anthropology Department and awarded me tenure at USC.

It took me a long time to get over my resentments against academics who dismissed my activist stance in my writing. In fact, I went through a disillusionment with academia that led me to engage a public audience even more than I had previously done. While I continued to teach my students and publish in academic journals, I turned my



primary attention to educating a wider public audience. The public became my students, and the mass culture my audience.

Ironically, the first opportunity I had to carry out some of these ideas was in 1987 when I went to Indonesia. To my surprise, shortly after The Spirit and the Flesh was published I learned that I had been awarded a Fulbright research scholarship. Given my resentments over my recent tenure battle, I welcomed the opportunity to get away from USC and from the United States. Having a choice of countries to live in, I chose Indonesia because I had learned from my research in ONE Institute and in the International Gay and Lesbian Archives that Indonesia also had cultural traditions of acceptance of same-sex love.

While in Indonesia in 1987 and 1988 I found a similar situation as among Native Americans. Ancient Indonesian traditions of sexual variance were succumbing to modern heterosexist influences coming from Christian and Muslim missionaries, as well as homophobia in Western psychological writings and American popular culture. In reaction to this increasing homophobia, a small number of brave gay activists undertook to challenge this heterosexist trend. Although I encouraged them to write the articles, I offered my computer and training the activists how to use it, as the means for publishing Indonesia's first gay rights magazine. I gave talks to various gay Indonesian activist groups, and they arranged for me to write articles in Pertiwi, one of Indonesia's most popular magazines, on the acceptance of same-sex relationships in Indonesia's traditional cultures. My status as an American professor opened doors and opportunities for publication that would not have been available for them. These articles were probably read by more people than any other articles I have ever published.

My next attempt to engage the Indonesian public was publication of a book based on my research there and written in Bahasa Indonesia. This book, Kehidupan Orang Jawa, published by a major press in Jakarta, was a series of biographies of people I interviewed in central Java, and aimed at a general readership. I feel that it is important for Indonesian people to be able to read, in their own language, books that incorporate information about same-sex love that is presented as an integral part of their culture.

I thoroughly enjoyed my year in Indonesia, and jumped at the opportunity to remain there an extra three months when I was invited by Gadjah Mada University to organize an American Studies collection in a room of their library. I taught a graduate seminar on American Studies to English teachers who were responsible for teaching other Indonesians to become English teachers. Here again, I was happy to have an influence as an openly gay professor who incorporated a gay studies perspective into my teaching.

My time in Indonesia, in turn, had an unexpected impact on my engagement with the public in America. While I was in Indonesia I discovered in my research that the most commonly reported sexual behavior between two males was *jehe pahet* [“between the thighs”]. This is an extremely safe form of sexual interaction that rarely contributes to transmission of sexual diseases. Yet when I came back to the United States I noticed that the entire focus of U.S. safer-sex educational campaigns was to “use a condom every time.”

My direct fieldwork experience in Indonesia prompted me to investigate evidence on other cultures’ methods of male-male sexual interaction, to find to my surprise that inter-femoral sex was actually reported as being common in many cultures, from ancient Greece to South Africa to Polynesia. This seemed to me, from the perspective of what I learned in Indonesia and my subsequent research, that US sex educators were making a

terrible mistake in telling everyone to “use a condom every time.” Not only did this ignore the large percentage of gay men who do not even like anal sex, and distort the dangers for those who preferred oral sex, but it also did not even begin to suggest other alternatives which were safer. If the safer-sex message had instead been, “enjoy every part of your body except your butt,” we would likely have lower HIV infection rates today. Even today, when safer-sex literature specifies mutual masturbation and “body rubbing” as safe, seldom does any safer-sex literature mention a very common behavior in other cultures. I gave a speech about this at an invited conference in Minneapolis that was sponsored by the Center for Disease Control, but mine was a lone voice that was easily dismissed and ignored even though it contained potentially life-saving information.

After my reluctant return to America in late 1988, I was surprised to find a big change at the University of Southern California. The controversy over my tenure battle had prompted much sympathy for my case, and the university gave me a significant salary increase and carte blanche to develop new courses in Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Studies. I found that I was now given more leeway in everything from teaching schedules to money for additional research. I spent the next summer in Alaska, continuing my research by interviewing Two Spirit Native Alaskans, and two sabbatical semester leaves in 1992 and 1993 doing similar interviewing of Polynesian mahus on the islands of Rarotonga, Molakai'i and the big island of Hawai'i. As my personal rapprochement with academia, I decided to publish my fifth book, a study of gender roles in Indonesia, as an academic study with a university press. Shortly after this book was published, the USC Anthropology Department voted a unanimous recommendation for my promotion to full professor. All of this was a lesson in how dramatically things can change in one's career.

Still, I retained my focus on engaging the public, rather than just addressing my writing solely to academics. By the time I returned to America, I was pleasantly surprised to discover that The Spirit and the Flesh had become one of the best selling books of Beacon Press. The book that almost lost me my job now was responsible for more recognition—inside academia as well as beyond—than everything else I had previously published.

What I did not predict as I was writing The Spirit and the Flesh would be the outpouring of responses from individual readers. An Indian artist from the Makah reservation in Washington state presented me with a painting he had done. A sculptor sent me a cast of his sculpture inspired by my work, two readers published poems based on the book, and the Los Angeles Gay Men's Chorus commissioned an opera with a Two Spirit theme. They asked me and Michael White Bear Claws, a Lakota Two Spirit person whom I quoted in the book, to speak at the premiere of the opera.

In my desire to have an impact on public thought, I began to realize that writing a book for a wider audience does not just influence those who actually read the book itself. I was interviewed in numerous newspapers, magazines, television and radio shows, reaching many people who never read books. As The Spirit and the Flesh became more noted, invitations for me to speak came from numerous groups, ranging from academic conferences to a gay men's nudist gathering. I was particularly pleased to speak to transgender support groups and community organizations of people of color, including not only Gay American Indians and a conference of "Two Spirit People of the First Nations," but also Gay y Lesbian Latinos Unidos, and Asian-Pacific Lesbians and Gays.

Some of the most enthusiastic audiences I have spoken to include Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (P-FLAG), who resonate to the theme of close family

relationships in the Two Spirit tradition. Some of the most surprising reactions have come from religious groups, like Metropolitan Community Churches, and an annual conference of the Unitarian-Universalist Association. I had no idea that my research on Native American religions would lead to invitations for me to speak to Christian churches, Jewish temples, Lesbian-feminist spiritual circles, and Buddhist temples. Other audiences have included groups like counseling therapists associations, Gay and Lesbian Community Centers, Men's Gatherings in various states, conventions of sex therapists, chapters of the American Civil Liberties Union, and the Creating Change national conference sponsored by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

Knowing the impact that knowledge about Two Spirit traditions had on me, I considered it my responsibility, even my duty, to let other people know about these Native American cultural traditions. I was proud to be the mechanism for the spread of knowledge that Native American cultures, to which I had a personal connection and which I had always admired, had such an accepting attitude toward sexual and gender diversity. This book thus represented an opportunity for me to continue publishing books that gave people an appreciation for Native American cultures, while also reducing heterosexism.

Though we should never underestimate the importance of our teaching to the students who take our university anthropology classes, by writing for a wider audience we can add to those we teach not only in person but also those we teach by the written word. I feel the work I have done by speaking to diverse public audiences is as important as my teaching in a USC classroom. When I serve as a consultant for an artist who is painting a public mural and wants to incorporate a representation of sexual minorities, I am doing as valuable educational work as when I lecture to students. When I inspire a student to

become a newspaper editor that is just as important as when I inspire another student to become a professional anthropologist. When I am interviewed by the mass market African American magazine BLK, to offer anthropological evidence that counters a homophobic rap singer's claim that homosexual behavior never existed in Africa, my words are probably having more impact than my most recent essay in Current Anthropology. Please understand that I am not advising anyone to avoid teaching or publishing in academic contexts, only to add an engagement with the public as a third major and respected duty.

Because I continue to feel that anthropology can offer crucially important insights to humankind, I am displeased with the tendency of many anthropologists to occupy themselves exclusively in inward-looking theorizing. I particularly object to those who think they are doing superior anthropology when they write jargon-laden prose that is readable only by other anthropologists, and look down their nose at those of us who engage the wider public.

I am particularly grateful for the public theme of this year's AAA meetings, because if it is not careful the field of anthropology will be in danger of following the trend of professional philosophy. Those of you who are familiar with the history of higher education know that a century ago the study of philosophy was considered central to an academic education. Overconfident and self-centered about their own importance, philosophers turned increasingly specialized, speaking and writing for other philosophers. Those who tried to write for a wider public were looked down upon by their colleagues, as vulgar popularizers. As a consequence the best minds trained in the academic discipline of philosophy followed the prime career path of writing for other philosophers. After several decades, the public, and eventually even the academy itself, turned against

the field. The end result is that today philosophy departments are marginal within universities, and a shadow of their former self. I hope the field of anthropology will not make a similar mistake.

It is particularly important for GLBT anthropologists to write to a wider public. Unlike other minorities who grow up within a community of acculturating older parents, relatives, teachers, mentors and role models, GLBT youth typically have no such childhood acculturation. Consequently, by the time they have reached sexual maturity and have accepted their sexuality, they have very little knowledge about other same-sex inclined people, and the various ways they might construct their life. For those with an inquisitive mind, they are hungry for information about the various options open to them. For such persons, a multicultural anthropological perspective can be window on the possibilities for their own life as well as a window on the world.

Anthropological perspectives are too valuable and needed in the world today for us to just simply write for other anthropologists. This is especially true in the United States, which sees itself as the world's sole super power. The reality is that the United States, for all its power, is increasingly dependent upon interacting with the rest of the world. We are in need of greater understanding of world cultures, instead of seeing our own way as the only correct way of doing things.

#### EXPERT WITNESS IN COURT CASES

Because I wrote The Spirit and the Flesh for a wider readership, it has led to many repercussions, in ways I would never have predicted. For example, I have been brought in as an expert witness in many court cases. The most famous case to which I contributed is the Hawaii same-sex marriage case, Baehr v. Lewin. One of the arguments presented by the state attorney general as to why same-sex marriages should not be legalized in

Hawaii, was his assertion that “marriage has always been between a man and a woman.” Attorney Dan Foley, working for the two lesbian couples and one gay male couple who sued for marriage licenses, brought in my research which showed that same-sex marriages have been accepted in many cultures around the world. The attorney general’s unsupported assumption was shown to be false, and as a result the attorney general dropped that line of argument altogether. As a result I was not called upon to testify, but I was still quoted extensively in Honolulu newspapers on the acceptance of same-sex marriage in traditional Polynesian cultures, and I was asked to speak at the University of Hawaii Law School on this subject.

Ultimately, the Mormon Church and other anti-gay forces in Hawaii prevented the enactment of legal same-sex marriage, but the debate over this case put same-sex marriage on the nation’s political agenda, and has resulted in improved domestic partnership laws not only in Hawaii, but also in the Vermont civil unions case.

#### LOUISIANA SODOMY LAW COURT CASE

In another court case I was brought in to testify as an expert witness in a challenge to the constitutionality of the Louisiana state sodomy law. The Louisiana state constitution specifies that laws must not contradict the values of Louisiana’s diverse cultures. The attorney who brought me in challenged this law on the basis that sexual acts made illegal by the state sodomy law contradicted the values of Louisiana’s Native American cultures. This tactic allowed me to educate the judge, the attorneys, and—since the trial received front page coverage in the major newspapers of the state—the public at large, in the knowledge that many cultures do not criminalize same-sex love. By deconstructing the purpose of sodomy laws, I suggested that such laws function to stigmatize gays and lesbians in the law, similarly to the way that Jim Crow laws of a



century ago stigmatized African-Americans in the law. That comparison made the headlines in the next morning's New Orleans Picayune. We won that case, but unfortunately it was recently reversed by the Louisiana Supreme Court, which ruled that sexual acts are an exception to the state constitution's promise of respect for cultural diversity.

These examples show how much legal change is a frustratingly slow “two steps forward, one step back” process, but in the field of immigration law I have found my testimony to be successful in an immediate sense. My research on the situation of gays and lesbians in China began in 1997 as a result of my work to gain admission of medical anthropologist Wan Yan Hai to the United States. One of China's leading AIDS educators and gay rights activists, Wan Yan Hai contacted a ONE Institute volunteer who was traveling in China, and wrote to me to apply to be one of our visiting scholars. He was particularly anxious for his application to be approved, because he was on the verge of being arrested in the Chinese government's latest crackdown on leading human rights activists.

With the help of the University of Southern California, I was able to quickly get him a visa to be admitted to the United States as a visiting scholar, and he literally got out of China just in the nick of time. Once he was settled in Los Angeles at ONE Institute, Wan and I organized the first international conference of the Chinese Society for Studies of Sexual Minorities. At this conference, which was held at USC, we heard testimony from a wide variety of speakers about persecution of homosexuals not only in China, but also in Hong Kong and Singapore. Since then I have worked with other Chinese researchers.

Armed with this knowledge, in the last three years I have been asked to be an expert witness on behalf of several gay Chinese immigrants to the United States, in their application to be granted political asylum on the basis of heterosexist persecution in China and Hong Kong. I am happy to report that, in every single case where I have served as an expert witness, it has resulted in a legal victory. I have been told on more than one occasion that my testimony, as a professor of anthropology, was crucial in providing the credibility for a pro-gay decision. Two other ONE Institute affiliated scholars, Dr. Igor Kon from Russia and my former graduate student Dr. Manuel Fernandez from Chile, also have served as expert witnesses in asylum cases of gay immigrants. In these cases, anthropological knowledge can have a dramatic impact on the lives of immigrants who might otherwise be forced to return to oppressive lives in their home country. And each victory in the courts creates more case law precedent that will help additional immigrants in the future.

#### ENGAGING THE PUBLIC TO OVERCOME PREJUDICE

In recent years, I am happy to have seen, USC has given emphasis to its faculty producing research that has wide public impact. I am gratified to see my university moving in the same direction I have been moving, in terms of engaging the public. Far from wanting us to sequester ourselves in our ivory tower, the USC administration likes to see their faculty, staff and students involved in community projects. That is part of the reason Time/Princeton Review named USC as the “College of the Year,” this past year. They praised USC for having “the most ambitious social outreach program of any private university in the nation.”

I have done that with my teaching, in developing a new course at USC titled “Overcoming Prejudice.” This class does not try to prove that prejudice exists or that it is harmful, but instead takes those positions as beginning assumptions. The focus of this course is to locate the most effective strategies and techniques for reducing prejudice and discrimination. Various kinds of prejudice are analyzed, including racism, sexism, heterosexism, ageism, anti-Semitism, and disableism. Students can choose a particular topic for their research paper, such as effective anti-prejudice strategies used by groups like the Japanese-American Citizens League, 1960s civil rights organizations, National Women Suffrage Association, the Anti-Defamation League, the Klanwatch Project of the Southern Poverty Law Center, or the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation.

USC has a wonderful Joint Educational Project arrangement with public schools in our south central Los Angeles neighborhood, and it is easy for classes to incorporate a service learning component. For example, as part of their requirements for my “Overcoming Prejudice” course, my students go to a local high school near USC and teach a segment on sexism and heterosexism. The oft-expressed statement that the best way to learn a subject is to have to teach a class on it, is certainly true in this case. Not only do my USC students have to learn the subject, but they spread a message of acceptance to kids who might not otherwise hear such a message in their schools.

The course I teach is extremely interdisciplinary, drawing not only on my anthropological research, but also on findings from scholarship in the fields of social psychology, history, sociology, political science, communications theory, and marketing theory. For example, I learned in the course of doing research for these lectures the importance of the mass media in changing public opinion. Newspapers, popular magazines, novels, radio, television and cinema all have a huge impact. They influence

attitudes not only because of the information they impart, but also because they engage the emotions of their readers and viewers. If the author of a fictional story can get the reader to emotionally identify with a main character who is a member of a stigmatized group, that reader will gradually lose prejudicial feelings. As academics we focus on rational arguments to persuade people to change their attitudes, but much prejudice is not based upon rational thinking. It is hard to reason someone out of a position they did not reasonably get into. Getting to their emotions is the key to attitude change.

Given the effectiveness of fictional drama, if we want to engage the public with anthropological knowledge and have an impact on society, this means we should be just as encouraging to our students who want to become screenwriters and mass market novel writers, as we are to those who want to become professional anthropologists. What is important is that fictional writers be given knowledge of other cultures in their anthropology classes so that they can incorporate accurate anthropological perspectives into their writing. Every feature film or novel about another culture needs an anthropologist consultant. If trained anthropologists disdain such consultant work, it only means that ignorant and distorted films and novels will continue to be written and produced.

Anthropologists have long recognized ethnographic film as an important tool for learning about other cultures. What we can learn from this overcoming prejudice research is the need to focus on a few sympathetic individuals with whom viewers can emotionally identify, rather than trying to offer a wide survey of characters. For example, a documentary film produced by Sylvia Rhue, a post-doctoral scholar we sponsored at ONE Institute, does this excellently. Her film, “All God’s Children,” focuses on the place of lesbians and gay men in contemporary African American churches. She

interviews leading black theologians like Cornell West, Rev. Jesse Jackson and Rev. Cecil Murray, as well as gay and lesbian church members and their parents. It is impossible to come out of this film with dry eyes, and anyone with a heart would be moved by the personal stories presented about prejudice, struggle, love and acceptance. It represents documentary filmmaking at its best.

Growing out of this class I published my most recent book, Overcoming Heterosexism and Homophobia: Strategies That Work. This book analyzes effective efforts by grassroots activists to reduce anti-gay prejudice, in community organizations, ethnic groups, schools, professional training programs, workplaces, churches, and the mass media. I am as proud of the award given this book by the Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network, as I am of any of my academic awards.

This book has led to even more of my attention going to engage the public. For example, I served on the advisory planning board for the educational division of the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center, designing courses that will help to reduce internalized homophobia among GLBT people. Other courses teach students how to reduce heterosexism effectively. I also led some training seminars in reducing homophobia for the Honolulu Gay and Lesbian Center. One of my graduate students at USC, Chuck Stewart, who got his Ph.D. in education did his dissertation research on effective strategies to reduce homophobia in police academy training programs. He has now published a book with Sage Press designed for public school teachers to incorporate anti-heterosexist teaching into their lesson plans.

## MUSEUMS AND PUBLIC EXHIBITIONS

Another means of engaging the public involves museums. From its very beginnings anthropology has been associated with museums. Though I began working with museums even while I was an undergraduate, it was not until my recent research that I learned of the huge impact that a well-designed museum can have on reducing prejudice. By getting across concepts in museum exhibits, we can reach people who would never read an anthropology book.

Thousands of people visit museums every day, and are affected in ways that even they might not understand. In the class that I teach on “Overcoming Prejudice,” I require the students to visit and write a critique of the Museum of Tolerance, an excellent museum in Los Angeles that focuses on the holocaust. Both Jewish and non-Jewish students come away from their visit intellectually and emotionally changed by what they learned. Many say their visit to this museum was the most moving experience of the semester. Many people can be reached by visual exhibits and film, in a way that reading text alone might not do.

At ONE Institute, one of our goals is to develop exhibits for an International Gay and Lesbian Museum. You can be sure that I am exerting my influence to make sure that these planned exhibits on same-sex love do not ignore the evidence from non-Western cultures. We are not going to have a Eurocentric museum, but one that aims for a truly global scope. So, after years of scholarly research that has taken me around the world, I find myself moving back to my early area of interest in museums. I am hopeful that we will eventually have an International Gay and Lesbian Museum that will be worthy of the name. In the meantime, the next time you are in Los Angeles, I invite you to visit the ONE Institute building at USC to see our gallery of museum exhibits. Better yet, come join us, and help to develop even better exhibits. We also encourage people to leave

ONE Institute in their will, to help endow such a museum in the future, and to send monetary contributions. If we anthropologists, who know the importance of museums, do not support a project like this, who else can be expected to support it?

### SPEAKING AND WRITING FOR OTHER DISCIPLINES

When we talk about anthropologists “engaging the public,” we must not overlook the impact that we can have by speaking and writing for other academic disciplines outside anthropology.

Also, I have been asked to give speeches at other disciplines

ex. a keynote speaker for Amer Psychological Assn

After speaking at such other conferences, I commonly say they should invite other anthros to contribute, and they say, “Oh we tried others, but no one could understand what they were talking about.”

Please, if we are going to have maximum impact on social attitudes, we have to get over our inclination to speak in jargon, and instead to focus on effective, clear communication.

I have been asked to write chapters giving a cross-cultural perspective in books published in other disciplines.

ex. psychologists Anthony D’Augelli and Charlotte Paterson asked me to write a chapter in their book on LGB Families, published by Oxford University Press. Why don’t we have every book, on every subject, with multicultural perspectives? In the case of this book, I pointed out the illogic of basing our model for “family” on the modern Western nuclear family model that was the only base comparison to what every other

speaker was speaking about. I stressed that we need to look at other models of family from other cultures, giving examples that we anthros are familiar with, including extended family, intergenerational relationships, [give Javanese dance teacher in Sultan's palace as fictive kin]

This is a plea for interdisciplinary work, which often can have a wider impact than work done within one academic discipline. I think it is indicative that I moved from being the editor of the SOLGA Newsletter in the mid-1980s, to today being the editor of the International Gay and Lesbian Review. Even though this is a scholarly journal, I have tried to have it reach a wider audience, from a deemphasis on jargon to being the first academic journal in our field to have its entire text published on the internet. I am especially interested in having anthropological books reviewed, and encourage any of you to contribute book reviews of books you have read, and to have your publishers send your books to be reviewed. You may see the International Gay and Lesbian Review online at [www.oneinstitute.org](http://www.oneinstitute.org)

I did my publishing not to get a promotion but because I wanted to have an impact on the world. I went into academia, not primarily to engage in discourse with other academics, but to have an impact on the world. Through teaching my students, those who listen to me speak, and those who read my writings, I aim to enlighten as many people as possible. I do not see this as pandering to the lowest common denominator, but as engaging the public in the widest possible realm.



## EXAMPLES OF WAYS IN WHICH ANTHROPOLOGY CAN HAVE AN IMPACT ON PUBLIC DISCOURSE AND ACCEPTANCE OF SAME-SEX LOVE

[taken from WW essay in Current Anthropology June 2000 ]

At long last the anthropological profession is beginning to pay attention to same-sex love, a form of human behavior that is quite widespread across cultures, but which has been singularly ignored in anthropological writing. What is most important for anthropologists to understand is why a minority of cultures stigmatize this pleasurable erotic interaction between persons of the same sex. It is not homosexual behavior which most needs to be analyzed by anthropologists, but homophobia. Anthropologists have ignored our responsibility and our role of pricking the bubbles of assumptions about what is “normal” behavior propounded by the other social sciences which base their analysis solely on modern Western culture. We ignore our professional responsibility if we do not publicize the reality of human individual and cultural variation on attitudes toward same-sex love.

In contemporary society fundamentalist Protestant and Catholic churchmen commonly state that “the only purpose of sex is reproduction.” Anthropologists above all others need to publicize the falsity of this statement. There are many purposes of sex, far more complex than procreative concerns. A major factor in sexual involvement is alliance formation. While kinship theorists have shown how heterosexual marriage leads to widening circles of mutual dependence and reciprocity obligation, sex between males with males and females with females can also produce close intimate bonds that aid

survival. Sexual involvement with friends and relatives produce overlapping circles of intimate involvement that complement reciprocity networks (Williams 1992a, 1992b).

If sexually relating to both males and females offers an advantage over an exclusive orientation to only one sex, how then are we to explain the establishment of compulsory heterosexuality in pre-modern European and Euro-American cultures, and then the rise of exclusive homosexuality in the modern world?

Let me suggest a hypothesis to account for the rise of compulsory heterosexuality: it helped to maximize population increase for competing European nation-states that wanted to expand their political and economic dominance in Europe and into colonial empires around the world. In this expansionist value system any form of non-procreative sex (for example: masturbation, birth control, abortion, oral sex) becomes stigmatized, in favor of penile-vaginal sex becoming established as the only acceptable form of sex for everyone. This hypothesis could explain why the most rabidly expansionist modern nation-states (for example: the United States, Nazi Germany, and the Soviet Union), and the most expansionist missionary-oriented Christian churches (for example: Catholics, Mormons, and fundamentalist Protestants) are associated with severe discrimination against homosexuality. That is, homophobia is, to a great extent, a product of expansionist missionary imperialism.

This hypothesis could explain why Japan, once one of the world's most accepting cultures of same-sex love (Watanabe 1989), has become so homophobic in the period since it began its expansionist empire. Social pressure to reproduce also explains why such high percentages of Japanese bisexuals and homosexuals marry heterosexually and have children. In the post-1945 world, as colonial empires started falling apart, and population growth is no longer the prime need, sanctions against non-procreative

sexuality have declined. Non-imperialistic European nations like those of Scandinavia and (after 1950) Holland, have unsurprisingly led the way in repealing laws against homosexuality.

Nevertheless, in the context that social norms of compulsory heterosexuality continue to be strongly dictated in the Western-dominated contemporary world, exclusive homosexuality may be a reaction against this compulsion. Many people continue to repress their same-sex desires and to identify as “heterosexuals,” but other individuals who feel strong same-sex attractions become psychologically frustrated. They become so disturbed because of social repressions that they either become depressed or suicidal, or they rebel against those norms. The social rebels flip over to the other extreme, to identify as “homosexuals/gays/lesbians/transgenders/queers”. There are many reasons why particular individuals construct identities as sexual minorities, but in the anonymity of large cities, becoming a member of a sexual underground can offer subcultural identification that can assist psychological functioning.

What this suggests is that, in order to get beyond a binary division of society, it will be necessary for people to destigmatize bisexuality. Anthropologists can be at the forefront of this effort, breaking down prejudices by teaching about the reality of human sexual variation. Of course, we must be careful not to substitute a compulsory bisexuality for everyone, since even non-homophobic cultures have a minority of individuals who remain totally other-sex oriented or totally same-sex oriented (see Williams 1986). The message must be the reality and advantage of human variation, rather than expecting everyone to have the same sexual desires or identities.

Another astounding perspective from an anthropological perspective is the role of same-sex attractions in strengthening warriorhoods. Contrary to claims by the United

States Armed Forces that “homosexuality is incompatible with military service,” a cross-cultural viewpoint suggests that same-sex intimate bonding leads to stronger mutual defense. While many nations are abandoning discrimination against gay and lesbian troops, it may take an anthropologist to suggest that policies suppressing sex between soldiers may in fact be counterproductive to defense effectiveness. Recognition of sex as a means of building stronger alliances between troops may be tacitly accepted, which would also avoid the huge expenditure currently borne by the United States military in its efforts to investigate and dismiss homosexuals from its ranks.

An anthropological perspective also challenges Western prejudice against intergenerational sexual bonding between men and boys. It is not surprising to find intergenerational male relationships to be so common among cultures that are accepting of same-sex love, because institutionalizing such age patterns lead to greater access to resources and knowledge acquisition for the younger partner. While unfortunately little is known of woman-girl sexual relationships, extensive cross cultural surveys of intergenerational man-boy patterns include Bullough (1976), Greenberg (1988), Gregersen (1983), Karsch-Haack (1911), Murray (1992), Weinrich and Williams (1991), and Williams (1998). Individual cultures which accepted man-boy sexual relationships include sites as diverse as ancient Greece (Dover 1978), feudal China (Hinsch 1990), Melanesia (Herdt 1981, 1984, 1987), and east Africa (Evans-Pritchard 1970).

In fact, such intimate bonds were often the basis for a culture’s educational training system. Rather than educating youths in schools, many cultures have structured education in individual apprenticeships. For example, in pre-modern Japan Buddhist monks and their student novices commonly developed sexual relationships that were socially accepted (Watanabe 1989). Likewise, in medieval southwest Asia, Mamluk

officials of the Sultanate governments were forbidden from having sex with females, but they commonly had a young boy as sexual partner. The adult Mamluk would educate this boy as his apprentice, to take on his administrative duties as he reached old age. For over a thousand years, this Mamluk system was largely responsible for government administration in areas ranging from Egypt to Turkey, as each successive generation of apprentices matured and took a boy as their trainee and sexual partner (Hardman 1990; Williams 1998).

For those cultures that are concerned about controlling pregnancies among females outside of marriage, encouraging young males to establish same-sex relationships has the added advantage of allowing youths a sexual outlet while also preventing female out-of-wedlock births and prostitution. That many cultures allow a same-sex outlet for pubescent, adolescent, and young adult males at the height of their sexual drive, also seems to be a realistic reaction to preserve social order (Williams 1986, 1992a, 1992b, 1996, 1998). Perhaps this is why intergenerational relationships are so much more institutionalized for males than for females. In the current climate of large population increases throughout much of the world, it seems sensible for anthropologists to publicize these ancient and indigenous population control mechanisms that function to delay heterosexual marriage until mature adulthood.

What is most important is that anthropologists take a leading role in countering ignorant claims that the only purpose of sex is reproduction. If we do not say it again and again, that sexual behavior is multi-purposed and highly variable, in both our teaching and publication, then we are allowing a major distortion of reality to continue. A key to understanding hominid evolution involves more than simply passing along genes; it also

requires survival strategies through alliances with others. Sexual relationships are an effective way to promote alliances.

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