

The Natural History of Homosexual Behavior in Nature [words 6,910 updated 7 Feb 2022]

From Walter L. Williams, "Introduction," *Gay and Lesbian Rights in the United States: A Documentary History*. Edited by Walter L. Williams and Yolanda Retter. Primary Documents in American History and Contemporary Issues. Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 2003, pages xxi-xxxv.

The struggle for gay and lesbian rights in the United States is based on the idea that feelings of love and sexual attractions between persons of the same sex are natural, moral, normal, psychologically healthy, and deserving of full equality in the legal, political, and all aspects of society. This movement for equality is a response to previously held ideas that homosexual behavior is unnatural, immoral, abnormal, psychologically sick, and legally, politically and socially unacceptable. This book contains documents that explore different viewpoints about this complex issue.

THE MORALITY OF UNNATURAL BEHAVIORS

Let's begin to try to understand the controversy surrounding gay and lesbian rights by examining the idea that sexual attraction of a female for another female, or a male for another male, is "unnatural." We first have to ask: If a behavior we engage in is "unnatural," does that necessarily make it wrong or immoral? If we think carefully about it, it is clear that human beings do many unnatural things every day. Think about your daily behavior and all the things you do which are not natural. Wearing clothes is not natural; we were not born wearing clothes, and these manufactured items are not part of

our natural body. Most of us cut or shave the hair that grows naturally on our body. Some of us dye our hair a color that is not natural, or tattoos on our body. Many of us undergo surgery to change the natural shape of our nose, thicken our lips, or remove natural fat deposits around our waists and hips.

Many ethical questions are raised by issues of unnaturalness. Should people be condemned because they choose to do something unnatural with their own body? Do people have a right to control their own body? If a person does not have this right, from whom must they gain permission? Who has the authority to set what is permissible and morally right for everyone else? Is it the law? If so, can voters elect new lawmakers to change the laws? Is it the scriptures of a particular religion? If so, what about people who follow a different religion? How does the law decide which religion everyone must follow, and reject the values of all other religions?

Most people in the contemporary United States believe that each person has the right to control their own body, even if that person chooses to do something unnatural with it. Most people also choose to accept many things that are unnatural in the areas of cultural learning and technological inventions. Right now you are doing something unnatural by reading; we don't naturally know how to read when we are born. You had to be taught how to read, and are reading this text on a manufactured piece of paper (unnaturally produced from a tree) or on a computer constructed by an unnatural robot. Most of us ride in an unnatural machine to our school or workplace, rather than walking everywhere on the legs that nature gave us. Gliding over the surface of a lake in a fiberglass motorboat is definitely not as natural as swimming. Nothing could be more unnatural than flying in an airplane. Yet, despite the plethora of unnatural behaviors we

engage in, most people in modern societies take them for granted. Rather than looking down on such unnatural behaviors, we value them as evidence of human advancement and inventiveness. Part of the joy of being human lies in transcending the biological limitations that constrain us. We should not fear reading, riding, boating, flying, or any behavior just on the basis that it is unnatural. From this perspective, how can we conclude that any form of behavior should be condemned merely because it is not natural? Therefore, why should we conclude that homosexual behavior must be rejected based on the claim that it is unnatural?

HOMOSEXUAL BEHAVIOR AND NATURE

If being unnatural does not necessarily make something bad, the next question to ask is: Is homosexual behavior, in fact, unnatural? What does it mean to say that an aspect of human behavior is “unnatural?” Does it mean that behavior not found in nature is “unnatural?” If so, sexual interactions between individuals of the same sex must surely be qualified as natural, because such interactions have been documented in practically all human populations since ancient times, as well as among many species of animals in the natural world. Homosexual behavior is commonly observed in animals ranging from seagulls to elephants, and lizards to whales. Same-sex erotic behavior is particularly common among primates, humanity’s closest relatives. For example, among bonobos (pygmy chimpanzees) same-sex erotic acts are notable in both females and males. Two females may form a tight bond, spending time grazing for food, resting and sleeping together, and rubbing each others’ genitals for pleasure. A juvenile male may form a sexual partnership with a particular adult male, who takes the younger one under his wing

and protects him and shares food. A young male learns how to become an adult partly within the context of an intimate relationship with a fully mature adult male. [John Kirsch and James Weinrich, “Homosexuality, Nature and Biology: Is Homosexuality Natural? Does It Matter?” in Homosexuality: Research Implications for Public Policy (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1991), pp.13-31; Bruce Bagemihl, Biological Exuberance: Animal Homosexuality and Natural Diversity (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999).]

The overriding characteristic of nature is variation and diversity. Nature thrives with a wide variety of life forms that take advantage of numerous ecological niches, and these life forms express their behavior in innumerable ways. This includes variation in reproductive and sexual behaviors. Many species of plants reproduce through the sexual spread of the male sperm through airborne pollen. Other plants use animals, like honeybees or hummingbirds, to reproduce. When we look at a beautiful flower, we must realize that we are admiring the sexual organ of the plant. Many species of animals do not engage in sexual behavior at all, but reproduce by simply dividing in two. Others species are both male and female, and reproduce by themselves. Still others are female while young, and become male later on in life.

Since a bewildering array of sexual variation is present among the many species of animals in nature, and especially among our mammalian relatives, we may conclude that it is “natural” for humans to exhibit sexual variation as well. Individual humans vary considerably. By observing individual people in our daily lives, we can see examples of this variation. Some people are short; some are tall. Some are lean while others are hefty. Hair color, eyesight range, ear shape, height of the arch of the foot, and a myriad other characteristics show variation in the human body. People also have varied

personalities and tastes. Some people are shy, while others are gregarious. Some people enjoy roller coaster rides, whereas others would rather sit silently by a mountain stream. Some people like to eat vanilla ice cream, while others prefer pistachio. The list of variations is endless, and as diverse as the number of humans alive. Diversity is not a threat; it is a reality of nature.

We are all unique in some way. Do we feel pride in our uniqueness, or do we feel ashamed for being different? Do we think of our uniqueness as something perverse, or as something that is exceptional? It all depends on the values of our society, and the extent to which we internalize those social values into our personal beliefs. For example, about ten percent of people are left-handed, making them statistically abnormal. Throughout much of European history, left-handed people were looked upon as abnormal and evil. Their left preference was believed to be a mark of the devil. Most left-handed people responded by learning to suppress their natural tendency to use their left hand, and instead learned to point, shake hands, and write with their right hand. Use of the right hand was “right,” and use of the left hand was wrong. As a result, many people were closeted left-handers! It has only been within the last century, after left-handedness was discovered to be genetically inherited, that prejudice against left-handed people decreased. Hand preference is no longer seen as a moral question, and teachers no longer try to force left-handed children to use their right hand. Left-handed people are different; their difference is obvious to everyone. Although left-handedness continues to be “abnormal” in any group of people, it is no longer looked upon as something about which someone should feel ashamed. Today, many left-handed people grow up without hearing condemnation about their hand preference, and as a result most people feel neutral about

their left-handedness, but some baseball players are justly proud of their leftie hardballs. One's attitude (shame, unconcern, or pride) depends to a great extent upon one's perspective.

Using labels like "abnormal" or "perverse," tends to stigmatize certain behaviors that are different.. Stigma is a negative value attached by society to certain characteristics. On the other hand, other unusual traits and behaviors might be praised and valued. For example, two centuries ago Amadeus Mozart as a young boy was noted for an unusual ability to compose music. He was certainly not normal compared to other children. Instead of being looked down upon, however, his musical inclinations were lauded as exceptional and he became the most honored composer of his age. Today, in a typical high school, we might see one unusually tall person slumping over in embarrassment about their abnormality, while another might use their advantage of height to become a star basketball player. An "abnormal computer nerd" who is laughed at as a "geek" may end up becoming the wealthiest person in town because of their fascination with computers and technical machines.

We are all abnormal in some aspect. This is a good thing, because if everyone were the same it would be a very boring world. Variation and difference is what makes the world a fascinating place. If variation exists in all aspects of human behavior, why would we expect that sexuality would be an exception? Sexual tastes, preferences, and inclinations vary among individuals, in the same way that food preferences do. Some people like coffee with cream, while others prefer tea with sugar. Some people like scrambled eggs, while others prefer their eggs fried. While this reality of variation is accepted in the case of food preferences, it is not accepted in the case of sexual variance.

Few Americans would label someone as immoral because they had a preference for a certain kind of food, but we often stigmatize those who prefer certain types of sexuality. Part I of this book deals with the clash of religious views over the morality of homosexual behavior. As the documents in the following sections of the book make clear, much of the legal, political and social attitudes related to homosexuality and bisexuality, as well as gender variance, reflect religious ideas. The battle for gay and lesbian rights in the United States goes back, in many ways, to the attitudes of religion toward sex and gender.

Considering the pervasiveness of same-sex behavior in nature, it is not surprising that the historical record also shows evidence of homoerotic desires dating back to ancient times, and in many areas of the world. One of the oldest epics of world literature is the five thousand year old Mideastern Hittite story of the intimate friendship between Gilgamesh and Enkidu. Ancient Greek legends of the love between the god Zeus and the young boy Ganymede, or between the warriors Achilles and Patroclus, were made famous in Homer's Iliad. Homoerotic poetry, where adult men expressed their love for adolescent boys, was so common in ancient Greece that for many years "Greek" was a synonym for homosexuality. It was also referred to as "Socratic Love," after the famous teacher Socrates who was a lover of males in Athens. The term "lesbian" originated from the Greek island of Lesbos where the famous female poet Sappho wrote poems of love to her female students [Byrne Fone, The Columbia Anthology of Gay Literature (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); K. J. Dover, Greek Homosexuality (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978)]. This tradition of respect for same-sex love existed not only in Greece but throughout the ancient Mediterranean. Famous

military leaders like Alexander the Great of Macedonia, and the greatly admired Emperor Hadrian of the Roman Empire, were both known to have had devoted same-sex relationships.

Traditions of same-sex love have been celebrated in other parts of the world as well. In ancient China, the Emperor Ai was famous for being so devoted to his boyfriend that when he was awakened to attend an emergency governmental meeting he cut off the sleeve of his coat rather than disturb the sleep of his partner who was resting on the coat sleeve. After that, male-male love in China was respectfully called “the love of the cut sleeve.” In Japan, the great cultural hero Kobo Daishi, founder of the Shingon sect of Buddhism in the year 800, was said to have popularized male-male intimate relationships. For a thousand years after that time, homosexual behavior was highly respected in Japan, particularly among Buddhist monks, Samurai warriors (“ninja” was the name by which a warrior referred to his male lover), and kabuki theater performers [Bret Hinsch, Passions of the Cut Sleeve: The Male Homosexual Tradition in China (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Tsuneo Watanabe and Jun’ichi Iwata, The Love of the Samurai: A Thousand Years of Japanese Homosexuality (London: Gay Men’s Press, 1989)].

Though we know far less about female-female eroticism in other cultures, male homosexual behavior was so institutionalized among some cultures in New Guinea that they believed a boy could not mature into a man until he had engaged in many sexual encounters with adult men and absorbed their masculinizing semen [Gilbert Herdt, Ritualized Homosexuality in Melanesia (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984; Gilbert Herdt, The Sambia (New York: Holt, Rinehart, 1987). Marriages between two females, or between two males, were institutionalized and socially accepted in many

cultures of the world, including the Azande of East Africa, the Polynesians of Hawaii, the Aboriginal people of Australia, and the Chukchi of Siberia. Woman-woman marriage was particularly notable in Africa. [Walter Williams, The Spirit and the Flesh: Sexual Diversity in American Indian Culture (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992); David Greenberg, The Construction of Homosexuality (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Stephen Murray and Will Roscoe, Boy-Wives and Female Husbands: Studies of African Homosexualities (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998)].

Given the widespread existence of same-sex behavior in both the animal world and among many human cultures dating from ancient times to the present, the correct question is not “what causes homosexuality?” We can no more expect a straightforward answer to that question than we can to the question “what causes heterosexuality?” The basic reality is that people vary in their sexual desires, and both homosexual and heterosexual desires are expressions of a single human nature that can be expressed differently in different individuals. Some people are attracted to the other sex and some people are attracted to the same sex. Many persons through history were known to be attracted to both males and females, making bisexuality more common than perhaps any other pattern. Even though most males in cultures like ancient Greece, New Guinea, and Japan celebrated male-male love, many of those same men also married women and fathered children. Many people wanted offspring in order to have someone to take care of them in their old age.

In this context, bisexuality would seem to offer an evolutionary advantage to humans. One of the main reasons for sexual pairings and marriage, besides producing offspring, is to create longstanding intimate bonds between people. If a woman attracts

the sexual interest of a man, and she marries him, ideally she gains not only the benefit of his labor and support, but also that of his relatives. This is why marriage is institutionalized in many cultures as uniting not only the two spouses, but both their families as well. If that same woman also has a female lover, she gains the support of her female lover and the latter's family in addition. Some anthropologists suggest that female homosexuality is more often expressed within the contexts of female social groups, like extended families, harems, and convents. Love and sexual attraction are powerful motivators for people to help one another. In short, sex is a main reason why individuals bond closely with other individuals. Whether this is done in marriage or in friendship, it serves the same purpose. A major purpose of sexual bonding is the development of close allies to whom one can turn in times of need. A person who bonds sexually with both males and females has an evolutionary advantage.

SEX AND REPRODUCTION

The question, then, is not to try to discover what "causes" any particular form of sexual bonding, but to discover why a minority of the world's cultures condemn and prohibit such bonding. Much of this condemnation has to do with social attitudes toward reproduction. Obviously, much sexual behavior and sexual attraction is closely associated with reproduction of the next generation. While a woman can easily impregnate herself by inserting male sperm into her vagina, without engaging in a sexual act with a man, most human pregnancies are the result of male-female intercourse. Some religious leaders have concluded that the only purpose of sex is reproduction, and that other non-procreative expressions of sexuality are therefore morally wrong. Think about

that statement, “the ONLY purpose of sex is reproduction.” Is this true? Or, are there many other purposes of sex, such as enjoyment, release of stress, and expression of love for another?

As mentioned above, anthropologists know that one of the most important purposes of sex for a society is the creation of close intimate bonds among non-related individuals. This is one reason why so many societies have incest rules, preventing people from having sex with someone in their own family. Such societies want to maximize the number of people in the family, to provide a larger support system. That is, if you marry your brother or sister, then you only have your own blood relatives to depend on. But if you marry a person who is unrelated to you, then you not only have your own blood relatives to depend on, but also your spouse and all your spouse’s blood relatives. Sexual bondings to unrelated individuals are economically important. The only time such rules are not applied is when a family is already at the top level of society, and to marry an outsider would represent a lowering of the family’s position because that family would then be expected to help a lower-level family. This is why the elites of hierarchical societies often favor brother-sister, or cousin marriage. Examples include the pharaohs of ancient Egypt and the ali’i royalty of traditional Hawaiian culture. Many of the royal houses of Europe encouraged their members to marry foreigners who were also of royal status, rather than marry a commoner at home. Their sexual alliances and marriages often had more to do with creating political alliances than feelings of personal attraction or love.

The point is that sex has many more purposes than reproduction. A major trend that has occurred in recent decades is the idea of “sex-as-fun.” This idea has been

promoted especially by capitalist advertising, and by commercial publications like Playboy. This so-called “Playboy ethic” has emerged as a major challenge to traditional Christian morality in 20th century American society. Commercial advertising uses sex-as-fun simply because it is so effective in selling products. Look at soda commercials, or cigarette advertisements; they don’t say “it tastes good, it is good for you.” Instead, the most common theme is “use our product and you will be a sexy person who will attract others as sexual partners.” Because sex sells, American capitalism has a vested interest in spreading the message that sex is fun.

As a result of receiving these two contradictory messages, that “sex is only for reproduction” and “sex is fun,” major tensions exist in modern society. For example, a 1990 radio commercial for the popular television prime-time soap opera “Falconcrest” advertised the program as having: “all of the sin, none of the guilt.” One of the reasons for the popularity of sexual “scandals” in newspaper tabloids and television programs, is due to this combination. People can partake of their strong interest in sex, without feeling the guilt that would come from doing these things themselves. People live their sins vicariously through others.

These tensions are especially strong in someone who believes that sex is only for reproduction. To such a person homosexuality represents prohibited acts not only because it is not procreative, but also because it is done only for the enjoyment of the sexual act itself. If a person believes that sexual enjoyment is morally wrong, and should only occur within marriage for reproductive purposes, homosexual acts violate these rules. Ironically, the legal prohibition of same-sex marriage guarantees that homosexual acts can only occur outside of marriage. Legal appeals brought to the courts by same-sex

couples, even if they have lived together for many years in a loving relationship and in a mutually-supporting family with children, have to this point been unsuccessful.

Since every person in the United States is legally unable to marry another person of the same sex, homosexual behavior necessarily involves breaking a social rule, the one that presupposes that everyone should marry someone of the other sex. Many people want everything to be clear and in its proper place; so homosexuality seems ambiguous. It violates the notion that everything should be arranged into clear pairs of opposites: good versus evil, black versus white, savage versus civilized, man versus woman.

Homosexuality is unsettling proof that much of the world cannot be ordered into opposite categories. Those who cannot tolerate ambiguity are often those who object most loudly to the cause of gay and lesbian equality. In an ambiguous situation, intolerant people strive to reduce the ambiguity. They want to prevent the mixture of categories which, in their view, should be kept separate. An example is people who dread inter-racial marriages, referring to it as “miscegenation.”

Thus, throughout the history of the United States homosexuality has been considered as a danger, in the same way that witches were greatly feared by people in medieval Europe and in the early American colonies. Witches broke the social rules of male dominance, and homosexuals break the social rules of sexual repression. Witches were seen as being the opposite of “normal people.” They stayed up late at night (therefore normal people went to bed early in order to prove that they were not witches). They flew through the air on broomsticks (rather than walking as normal people did). Women were active leaders in pre-Christian Wiccan religions. This was in contrast to the male-dominated Christian church where only males could be the top religious leaders.

Witches were said to prefer dressing in black, a color associated with medieval ideas of evil. Because witches were associated with cats, Christian zealots went on rampages killing thousands of cats. This slaughter contributed to the outbreak of the bubonic plague in medieval Europe, because with fewer cats there was a sharp increase in the disease-carrying rat population.

In many ways, the anti-gay rhetoric of today repeats these same ideas. Like witches, homosexuals are seen as being the “opposite” of normal people. Something that might otherwise be seen as an advantage (being able to fly through the air, for witches, or being sexually fulfilled and unrepressed, for gays and lesbians), is converted into a stigma. Whether something is labeled a “heresy” or a “perversion,” the idea is the same: difference is a threat. As a result of the notion that there is something wrong about same-sex love, many people worry about homosexuals “converting” others, and “recruiting” children into homosexuality. This shows that they believe homosexuality is a potential for everyone. They think that any unsuspecting child can be recruited into a gay lifestyle by a single pleasurable sexual act. They see the most severe sanctions (laws against it, employment discrimination, segregation of homosexuals from schoolchildren and even from other young adults in the military) as necessary to prevent “it” from becoming rampant in society.

Those who feel that the only purpose of sex is reproduction must oppose the acceptance of homosexual behavior because it is a violation of their belief system. What this suggests is that, to gain gay and lesbian equality in the United States, a much more fundamental argument must be made against the notion that the only purpose of sex is reproduction. This is why the movement for lesbian, gay, bisexual, intersex, and

transgender equality is integrally related to the movements for access to birth control, abortion, and sexual freedom in general. All of these movements argue for the acceptance of sex which is engaged in for reasons other than reproduction.

The ideology expounding sex for purposes of reproduction, was taken to its illogical conclusion by Germany during the 1930s and 1940s. The Nazis strongly emphasized the need for more “Aryans” (Germanic peoples), in order to expand their military empire. Homosexuals, along with Jews and others the Germans considered “subhuman,” were put into concentration camps. Homosexuals did not reproduce and were therefore seen as useless in building the Aryan race. They were designated as a “health hazard” because they might “infect” others with their non-procreative homosexual behavior. Nazi rhetoric against homosexuals sounds frighteningly similar to the arguments of those who oppose gay and lesbian equality [Richard Plant, The Pink Triangle: The Nazi Persecution against Homosexuals (New York: Holt, 1986)].

More people are beginning to question the notion that homosexuals are inferior because they do not reproduce. Today, there is almost universal agreement that overpopulation is one of the world’s major problems. In the past, anyone who did not reproduce was considered as something of a traitor, because they were not contributing to population growth. It seems ridiculous to hear someone argue that “if everybody were homosexual, the human race would become extinct.” In today’s world, the danger of TOO MUCH reproduction is a greater threat to humanity’s future. On this level, there is a logical connection between the gay and lesbian liberation movement and the ecology movement.

This perspective also suggests that a prime goal of the gay and lesbian liberation movement must be to legalize same-sex marriages, especially since more same-sex couples are having or adopting children. This trend toward coupling and parenthood will undercut the notion that homosexuality is “anti-family.” It will allow the social recognition of genuine homosexual families based on same-sex love. This is basically a struggle for the freedom to marry the person of one’s choice. In United States law, the idea that no one else can legally force someone to marry against their will, was introduced into the new United States as a reaction to arranged marriages in other nations. The freedom to marry was considered a personal choice outside the control of government, and an inalienable right of United States citizenship. However, in many states, the freedom to marry was originally restricted to white people. Up until the Civil War, laws in the Southern states prohibited anyone from marrying a black slave. Part of the progress in ending slavery was the ability of African Americans to legally marry. Still, until as late as the 1960s, some states had laws that prohibited men and women of different races from marrying. Racists predicted dire social consequences if people of different races were allowed to marry. They said they wanted to “protect marriage” by preventing miscegenation. Nevertheless, after many protests by civil rights activists, in 1969 the United States Supreme Court ruled that state laws prohibiting interracial marriages were unconstitutional. The right to marry the person of one’s choice was deemed to be a basic freedom of United States liberty. However, at the beginning of the 21st century this principle—the right to marry whom we choose—has still not been applied to same-sex couples in the United States. A number of other nations, however, have legalized same-sex marriages.

PSYCHOLOGICAL REACTION FORMATION

If the right to marry a person of one's choice is so ingrained in United States law, why is there so much resistance by some citizens to the idea of same-sex marriage? The psychological theories of Sigmund Freud suggest that one reason for strong reactions against homosexuals is, ironically, because same-sex attractions are common among people. Freud said that a major reason for hatred comes from what he called "reaction formation." If a child develops a desire, that she or he later finds out is severely condemned by the child's parents or significant others, then the child will internalize that condemnation by denying the existence of that desire within her or himself. Among some people, the desire is so repressed that it may never recur, but in others unconscious thoughts may occur. In the latter case, persons strive to maintain denial, by expressing intolerance of the desire in others. Among people who still feel the desire despite learning that it is condemned, intense feelings of conflict and self-hatred arise. Freud pointed out that this repressed, or "latent homosexuality" is quite common among people. In order to maintain their denial of this desire, people will condemn and punish others who do not repress that same desire ["Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex," in The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud ed. A.A. Brill (New York: Modern Library, 1938); "Character and Anal Eroticism (1908)" and "Repression (1915)" in Sigmund Freud: Collected Papers ed. J. Riviere (New York: Basic Books, 1959)].

In this situation, anyone who is openly bisexual, gay, lesbian, or transsexual is seen as intentionally flaunting the rules, and deliberately challenging social conventions. A follower of Freudian psychology wrote: "The dread of homosexuality is the result of,

and derives its tremendous force from, the wishes for homosexual expression which are present in our unconscious minds. In other words, the fear is intimately connected with the wish, and the wish is only repressed because of the dread which is conjured up by the social taboo.” [Martin Hoffman, The Gay World: Male Homosexuality and the Social Creation of Evil (New York: Basic books, 1968, pp. 181-182)]. Even if we do not want to believe Freud’s claim that every person has at least some same-sex desires, it is clear that reaction formation is experienced by a large number of people. Those who recognize their own attractions to others of the same sex, especially if these attractions are held as closely guarded secrets, are often the people most likely to publicly condemn openly gay and lesbian people. By making a public statement of condemnation, they can try to convince others – and themselves—that they are not really part of the dreaded category of sexual perverts. This theory suggests that such psychological motivators for condemnation will not change until children are raised in a way that does not repress their early sexual attractions.

GENDER ISSUES

Opposition to gay and lesbian rights also relates to gender discrimination. Here we must understand the concept of “heterosexism.” If sexism is the belief that the male sex is superior to the female sex, then heterosexism is the belief that heterosexuality is superior to other forms of sexuality. These two forms of prejudice, sexism and heterosexism, are closely tied. United States society has traditionally seen men as superior to women. Therefore, for a woman to dispense with a male indicates that she is not staying in her subordinate place. Likewise, for a man to become like a woman in any

respect is seen as a betrayal of the superior masculine status, and as taking on the inferior feminine status [Suzanne Pharr, Homophobia: A Weapon of Sexism (Little Rock, Ark: Women's Project, 1988)].

The sexist and heterosexist reaction against homosexual males is particularly strong, and is manifested in two ways. First, if a male submits to being penetrated sexually by a male, as a woman is penetrated, he is seen as being like a woman and therefore inferior. We still retain the notions that being sexually penetrated is bad, as represented by the saying "I was really screwed" meaning that something bad happened to us. Why is it considered bad? Perhaps it is because we consider women to be inferior. So when we say "Screw you" as an insult, we are really telling that person to put themselves in the subordinate status which our society has assigned to a person who takes the "insertee" role in sex. When society considers sex to be a bad thing, and women to be inferior, then this notion that sex is a means of domination will be stronger.

The second aspect of heterosexism has little to do with particular sexual behaviors, but instead focuses on personality characteristics. A female who does not act submissively or femininely is perceived as leaving the "natural" role for women, and rebelling against established gender values. Conversely, a male who does not conform to masculine stereotypes is seen as acting "effeminate," like a woman. An effeminate male who is also homosexual violates masculine superiority in two ways. He is seen as lowering himself from the superior masculine status, and as being "less than a man" because women are seen as being less than men. Research has shown that the most virulent anti-gay bigots are those who have the most narrow and rigid ideas of what constitutes proper roles for men and women. They hold narrow views of what

“masculinity” and “femininity” should be. What the research shows is that we cannot get rid of anti-gay prejudice without also getting rid of sexism. As long as women are considered to be inferior to men, any male who takes on a status similar to women is going to be condemned as inferior [Pharr, Ibid.; Warren Blumenfeld, Homophobia: How We All Pay the Price (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992)].

This is why it is absolutely necessary for gay men to support the feminist movement. This is where gay men and feminists can be allies, because they are both opposing the privilege accorded those who are considered “masculine.” Lesbians are a natural bridge between the two groups, since they experience both sexist and heterosexist forms of discrimination. This perspective implies that gay men should promote lesbians as leaders in the gay rights movement, and should be supportive of feminist issues, for their own self-interest if nothing else.

THE FUNCTIONAL THEORY OF HOMOPHOBIA

The term “homophobia” has been used to describe someone’s revulsion and fear of homosexuals, expressed through prejudice, discrimination, harassment, punishment, or acts of violence. Psychologist Gregory Herek sees homophobia as resulting from the psychological benefits that people derive from it. Homophobia thus has a functional role, especially for males. From the time they are small children, boys are told to “act like a man.” Fear of not being a “real man” is an important socializing agent for boys growing up in this society. This keeps men within their traditionally defined roles in society, and forces them to counter their real desires: avoid showing fear because bravery is valued, hide pain because emotional isolation is valued, do not show love for another male

because competition is valued, and do not submit to another male because dominance is valued.

It is, of course, difficult for men to attain these valued ideals, and they have to constantly strive to deal with suppressed emotions when they cannot succeed in the competitive contest. Thus, those males who are the least “successful” in the terms that society values (ie: economic wealth, and domination over others), are often the ones who express the most homophobic attitudes. Homophobia becomes an easy way that they can validate their own masculinity, by seeing homosexuals as below them. Since they have failed to validate their masculinity through economic success or by commanding others, condemning homosexuals is an easy way for a man to reaffirm to others (and to himself) that he is indeed “a real man.” He is not homosexual, therefore he is not like a woman. Male homophobia acts out the anger and fear that men feel at the possibility of being subjugated to another man, and of being treated the way women are treated [Gregory Herek, “Beyond Homophobia: A Social Psychological Perspective on Attitudes toward Lesbians and Gay Men,” Journal of Homosexuality 10 (1984): 1-21 see p. 6; Gregory Herek, “Stigma, Prejudice, and Violence against Lesbians and Gay Men,” in Homosexuality: Research Implications for Public Policy (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1991), pp. 60-80.].

In his psychological research studies, Dr. Herek found that people who are strongly homophobic tend to exhibit certain attitudes:

1. They are much more authoritarian-minded than the average person, with strong feelings that it is necessary for everyone to follow the rules and not question authority.

2. They have rigid and restrictive ideas about the proper roles for men and women. They believe that women should be housewives and mothers, while men should be breadwinners and strong providers.
3. They subscribe to a conservative religious ideology that promotes the idea that homosexuality is sinful.
4. They have not been exposed to an educational setting where a diverse campus promotes a general appreciation for diversity. This applies to adolescents who have not yet attended college, or older people who never went to college.
5. They live in geographic areas where negative attitudes toward homosexuality are the norm, and their peers tend to exhibit similar attitudes.
6. They have never had close ongoing personal contact with an openly-identified lesbian or gay man, as a relative, close friend, or co-worker.

If someone combines several of these characteristics, then their homophobia is even stronger. Conversely, those who are less likely to be homophobic tend to have the following characteristics:

1. They do not simply follow authority, but question things and make up their own mind about issues. They are much more independent-minded.
2. They are much more open to flexible gender roles for both women and men.
3. They believe in a religion that does not preach opposition to homosexuality, or they are not religious.
4. They are more educated (although some well-educated persons may be homophobic if they are also more authoritarian or religious, or if they have a personal problem with homosexuality due to their own repressed sexuality).

5. They live in more liberal-minded communities, and their peers are more accepting of homosexuals.
6. They have had at least one close ongoing personal contact with an openly-identified lesbian or gay man, as a relative, close friend, or co-worker [Herek, Ibid.].

Herek and other researchers emphasize the multiple origins of negative attitudes toward homosexuality. People become homophobic as a result of being told from an early age, that same-sex love is unnatural, immoral, illegal, and a threat to children, to the family, to religion, and to society in general. It is because these homophobic and heterosexist views have been so dominant in society, that a movement for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual and transgender rights has arisen. This movement has challenged these prejudices, and in the process has tied into the historical tradition of movements for equality and against discrimination. The essence of the argument for gay and lesbian equality is the proposition that two people who love each other should be able to do so, without social or legal interference from others. The gay rights argument says that sexual and gender identity differences need to be accepted, that sexual minorities should be treated as respectfully as any other minority. The contribution of this struggle to the modern concept of liberty is the idea that the freedom to love the person of one's choice should be considered as a basic freedom, no less important in peoples' lives than the freedom of speech, of expression, of assembly, and other intimate aspects of peoples' personal lives. All aspects of liberty contribute to the rich diversity that makes up the United States, and each aspect becomes a part of the fabric of democracy.

APPROACH OF THIS VOLUME

This book contains historical documents which present the story of the legal, political, religious, personal, and social struggle for the rights of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transsexuals, intersex and transgendered persons. The book focuses on both social and government documents. Oral histories, articles in popular magazines, sermons, autobiographies, and private letters, are as important as laws, court cases, congressional committee hearings, and presidential speeches. The editors have included documents that reveal different aspects of the controversy. In general, documents are arranged chronologically to show the development of the struggle over time. While space considerations necessitated the deletion of some topics, we sought to include as many representative voices and as many of the issues as would fit into one volume. The reader will find a mix of voices representing a cross section of generations, ethnicities, classes, religions, races, occupations, ideologies, and genders. The purpose of the book is to present the ideas and reasoning of the authors of the documents, and to make available multiple documents that will help clarify the controversy over gay and lesbian rights in the United States.