

# Hegemony and the internalisation of homophobia caused by heteronormativity

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## Abstract

*The aim of the article is to focus on hegemony as it relates to the issue of sexuality and the trauma imposed on sexual minorities. A point of departure is that social identity theories can shed light on homophobia. The article argues that an empathic approach to those traumatised by internalised homophobia calls for a gay-friendly psychotherapy/analysis. The article reflects particularly on how heteronormativity maintains homophobia. It also illustrates the relationship between homophobia and social scientific insights regarding personality types and gender. The concepts homophobia and the internalisation of homophobia are discussed by focusing on aspects such as personality types and violence. The article finds that blind submission to heteronormativity, an outdated social construct, traumatises those who do not conform to the hetero norm, in two ways: hegemony is one consequence, and internalised homophobia is another.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In a previous article entitled “Sexuality and shifting paradigms – setting the scene” I illustrated that the social environment of the Biblical world can be distinguished in the Eastern Mediterranean (Semitic) and the Western Mediterranean (Greco-Roman) contexts and that in both these contexts sexuality, religion and marriage were intertwined, though the values attributed to them, were different (see Dreyer 2005:729-751). I argued that, in order to understand the changes in the values attributed to sexuality, religion and marriage over time – from premodern, to modern, to postmodern times – one should not only investigate their social dynamics in the different eras, but also take note of the social scientific critical theories that have revealed to what extent sexuality as a social construct had been determined by a male perspective.

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Theologians and exegetes should not ignore changes in social life – in particular with regard to the vast differences that have come about from the contexts of Eastern Mediterranean, Western Mediterranean, medieval, Catholic, Protestant, to the modern and postmodern worlds. A postmodern notion of sexuality is that it is not a homogeneous entity, but the result of an endless variety of ever changing factors. The logical consequence will be to acknowledge that different times and different societies will produce different sexual practices, experiences, values and meanings and that these will always be changing. Sociological, cultural and technological changes forever taking place at a rapid pace, will keep widening the gap between our times and those of the Bible, between our notions of sexuality and those of the Bible. The challenge today is to find a spiritual ethos according to which people can live with the biblical message of redemption in the presence of God within the context of the faith community but without blind submission to outdated social constructs.

In two other articles I illustrated how prejudice leads to the theologically untenable phenomenon of homophobia (see Dreyer 2006a:155-173; 2006b:445-471). The present article focuses on the phenomenon as such. My argument in the first of the two articles (Dreyer 2006a) was based on the assumption that social identity theories underlie homophobia. Empathy with those traumatised by homophobia therefore calls for a gay-friendly psychotherapy/analysis. The second article (Dreyer 2006b) proposes biblical theological perspectives for a postmodern church which is inclusive and loyal to the spirit of the Christian gospel.

Focusing on the aspects homophobia and internalised homophobia, the current article emphasises the necessity of a gay-friendly psychotherapy/analysis. It reflects particularly on how heteronormativity enhances homophobia. It also aims to illustrate the relationship between homophobia and social scientific insights regarding the relatedness of personality types and views on gender. The phenomenon “homophobia” is discussed by focusing on aspects such as violence, personality, and the internalisation of homophobia.<sup>1</sup> The article concludes with a discussion of the trauma caused by the hegemony of heteronormativity and the damage done by internalised homophobia which is the result of blind submission to heteronormativity as an outdated social construct.

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<sup>1</sup> See especially Currie, M R, Cunningham, E G & Findlay, B 2004. The short internalized homonegativity scale: Examination of the factorial structure of a new measure of internalized homophobia. *Educational and Psychological Measurement* 64(6), 1053-1067.

## 2. GAY-FRIENDLY PSYCHOTHERAPY/ANALYSIS

The initial encounter between psychotherapy and homosexuality was not gay-friendly. What is today considered to be “stereotyping”, was academically posited by psychoanalysts in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (see Kardiner 1954; Bergler 1956; Fried 1960; Bieber 1967). Such labels as sociopath, child molester, alcoholic, murderer, were found abundantly in the psychoanalytic theories about gays at the time. Therefore gays were not accepted for training as psychotherapists in that era (Lewes 2003:165-166). Theory dictated the value of human beings.

Psychoanalytic theory has changed significantly and has made “gay-friendly” therapy possible. Yet, himself a gay psychoanalyst, Kenneth Lewes (2003:169) criticises present-day psychotherapy as follows:

They [gay people] learn quickly which aspects of their psychologies will be listened to and welcomed and which will be ignored or rejected as unreal, improper, or distasteful. Insofar as the new, gay-friendly psychoanalysis has, on the whole, replaced the central notion of phallic sexual and aggressive drives by yearnings for attachment and affiliation, it favors – or as we now say “privileges” – the latter by listening closely for their appearance and welcoming them in all sorts of apparent and covert ways. This has enormous implications for the psychoanalytic treatment of gay men.

If gay men coming to therapy are preoccupied with sex for its own sake at that point in their lives, and are not, as the prevalent theory dictates, motivated by a “yearning for relationship” they will not be adequately listened to and taken seriously. This, according to Lewes (2003:17) is the dilemma of today.

The tendency of psychoanalysis to move away from sexuality as a prime motivation for human behaviour, is a reaction to the beginnings of the discipline, the theories of Freud. Jung (1961) and Reich (1949) already began moving away from sexuality as the focal point. This tendency was taken up by many subsequent schools of thought of such great variety as the social orientation of Horney (1939), Fromm (1959), the Ego Psychology of Hartmann (1939), the Self Psychology of Kohut (1971), the relational orientation of Mitchell (1990) and the Intersubjective School of Stolorow (1987). Recently some psychoanalysts turned their interest again to sexuality affirming it as “an essential part of our understanding of human nature and behavior” (Lewes 2003:172). Lewes (2003:172) points out that this stance did not always serve only the interests of psychotherapy and therefore the patient, but was sometimes also socially and politically motivated. An example is the

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Adaptation School of the 1950s' repudiation of sexuality and especially bisexuality (see Rado 1940). Lewes (2003:172-173) puts it as follows:

It propagated a particular version of American social arrangements by idealizing a set of socially sanctioned gender roles and by labelling any deviation from them as substandard and pathological. Similarly, the development of Self Psychology in the '70s, with the privileged place it offered to processes of self-regulation, can also be seen as a response to the particular kind of social and political anomie that characterized the period.

The larger part of the approximately hundred years of psychoanalysis was homophobic, diagnosing gays and treating them with disdain (cf Lewes 2003:187; O'Connor & Ryan 1993). More recently there has been an attempt to make amends (see Feldman 2002). Lewes (2003:187-188), however, believes that the new psychoanalytic discourse on homosexuality still exhibits homophobic elements. This not as visible or overt as it used to be, but is masked by an ostensibly homophobic or gay-friendly attitude. He suspects that a reason for this could be a deep-seated obligation felt by psychoanalysts to protect the values and institutions of society such as "family piety" and gender roles. He attributes the "overcompensated piety and sanctity regarding family values" to the decline in contemporary society of the institution of marriage and the values that go with it. The television "soap", *The bold and the beautiful* illustrates this. There is an easy exchange of marriage partners and sexual relationships among the various members of the family and subsequently babies are born from this "merry mix-up", while right through all of these goings on emphatic pronouncements about family and the importance of family are made by all.

As far as gays are concerned, the "new" approach of psychoanalysis could be nothing more than a "new" set of stereotypes yet again employed to reassure society in its values and attitudes. According to Lewes (2003:189; cf Drescher 1998) the "new" gay is:

a person who wishes to outgrow his prowling sexuality, if he has not already done so. He seeks permanent ties of attachment and a stable and respected conventional social position. He frequently longs to be readmitted into his family of origin and to have his own children. He yearns to find his deepest identity by rediscovering his ethnic roots and religious heritage. He wishes to be accepted like everyone else, and, though he may harbor some dissatisfaction with the way things are being run, he is happy to be a happy citizen.

Most important, he does not dissent in any essential way from the way things are supposed to be.

The question is whether this “fictional stereotype” is a description of what gays themselves would like to be or whether this is just the new prescription for gays to fit into if they wish to be accepted by society. If the latter is the case, what will be the fate of gay persons who do not subscribe to current social values, but who take their own experience seriously and do not allow themselves to be “coerced into conformity” by a “homogenizing and totalizing social system” (Lewes 2003:190, 191). The role of psychoanalysis should rather be that of critiquing social forms while protecting individual people. This does not mean that social values are to be discarded. However, values should be approached with caution. They should not be considered absolute and therefore applicable to everyone in the same way.

### 3. HETERONORMATIVITY

The term “homophobia” was first coined by G Weinberg (1972) to mean “the irrational condemnation of homosexual individuals, which results in violence, deprivation, and separation”. For some the term is not adequate to express the extent of the oppression of people on account of their sexual identity. In psychology *phobia* denotes fear, usually irrational. Some feel what is called *homophobia* is much more than just an irrational fear. It is a prejudice which often leads to acts of discrimination, abuse and violence. *Homo* which means “the same” places the emphasis on the oppressed rather than on the oppressors. Alternative terms presented are: *gay* and/or *lesbian hatred or hating*, *sexual orientationalism* (along with racism, sexism, etc) and *heterosexism*, “defined as both the belief that heterosexuality is or should be the only acceptable sexual orientation and the fear and hatred of those who love and sexually desire those of the same sex” (Blumenfeld 1992:15). Heterosexism leads to prejudice, discrimination, harassment and violence. It is driven by fear and hatred. The term *heterosexism* includes both the cultural precedence of heterosexuality and what is commonly referred to as *homophobia*. Some prefer to retain the term *homophobia* since it has become entrenched and is widely used by all groups and also by the media. Blumenfeld (1992:18) summarises it as follows:

[W]e are all born into a great pollution called *homophobia* (one among many forms of oppression), which falls on us like acid rain. For some people spirits are tarnished to the core, others are marred on the surface, and no one is completely protected. But neither are we to blame. We had no control over the formulation of this

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pollution, nor did we direct it to pour down on us. On the other hand, we all have a responsibility, indeed an opportunity, to join together to construct shelter from the corrosive effect of oppression while working to clean up the homophobic environment in which we live. Once sufficient steps are taken to reduce this pollution, we will all breathe a lot easier.

Since the seventies “homophobia”, denoting negative attitudes towards homosexual people, has become a more general term (see Gough 2002:219). Audrey Lorde (1988:321) defines homophobia as “a terror surrounding feelings of love for members of the same sex and thereby a hatred of those feelings in others” and heterosexism as “a belief in the inherent superiority of one form of loving over all others and thereby the right to dominance”. Together they mirror a culture of “heteronormativity”, which, according to Oesterreich (2002:288; cf Blumenfeld 1992), is “the idea that society and political economy presuppose the consistent pairing of women and men ... Consequently, heteronormativity inherently limits who is counted as a citizen and the ways in which a citizen can participate in democratic citizenship.” Gender is construed by society to be a matter of “either/or”: one is either male or female. There is nothing in between. Gender norm deviations are punished by social means such as stereotyping and labelling (see Thorne 1995; Wong et al 1999; West & Zimmerman 1987). In order to make the label stick, traits which emphasize their “abnormality” are exaggerated – gay men as effeminate and gay women as “butch”. Homophobia is the consequence of this, embedded in a society that tends to conceptualise gender in a binary way (see Bem 1993; Gagne, Tewksbury & McGaughey 1997:478-508; Ingraham 1994:203-219; Wong et al 1999:19-31).

Psychoanalyst Donald Moss (2003:197-223) discusses why and how homophobia is internalised by men specifically, generating “extreme and unbearable states of mind – the suicidal and homicidal despair, the private and public emergencies ...”. He describes the emotional double bind of trying to find a suitable lifestyle when gay. According to him, gay and lesbian people experience relationships where they can receive and express love, as paradoxical. They need and crave love, as every human being does. Their negative feelings about their sexuality, internalised on account of cultural attitudes, cause them to want to avoid the expression of their “disgusting sexuality”. Their human need for love, on the other hand, drives them to pursue it. When they do find love, they experience the double bind: “One hates oneself for wanting what one wants, and therefore for being what one is ... The yield of both wishing and identifying, of pursuing what one wants and who one wants to be, is a vicious narrative of repeated promise and repeated

disappointment. Love damns rather than redeems” (Moss 2003:205). When the pain of this situation becomes unbearable, it can result in suicide, which is the attempt to finally get rid of the perceived cause of the pain.

#### **4. HOMOPHOBIA AND VIOLENCE**

The 1984 study of the National Gay Task Force found that 90% of males and 75% of females reported verbal harassment because of their sexual orientation and nearly 50% of them were also threatened with physical violence. According to the information gathered by the Community Against Violence (CUAV), hate crimes against gays and lesbians have risen by 35% from 1991 to 1995. Cullen, Wright and Alessandri (2002:120-121; cf Berkman & Zinberg 1997:319-332; Grack & Richman 1996:59-68; Whitley & Kite 1995:146-154; Kunkel & Temple 1992:1030-1040; Connor, Richman, Wallace & Tilquin 1990:1147-1152; Kurdek 1988:727-738; Maykovich 1975:1014-1020; Nyberg & Alston 1976-1977:99-107; Smith 1971:1091-1094) identify some variables which influence homophobia: an individual's support for traditional gender roles; gender; the degree of religiosity; religious affiliation; the amount of personal contact with a gay man or lesbian; the coping style and degree of empathy of the persons themselves. According to them, those who find it imperative to hold on to traditional gender roles will find it very difficult, if not impossible, to be tolerant of any behaviour that does not fit in with what they believe to be “the way it is”.

Studies have shown that heterosexual males generally have more hostility towards homosexual people than heterosexual women (see Herek 1988:451-477; Kite 1984:69-81; Weis & Dain 1979:341-347). The reason for these gender differences is explained by Herek (1988:451-477) as women and men having different experiences in the world. By rejecting men who are “different”, men affirm their own masculinity. This ideology is supported by male peers, but not by heterosexual women who do not see the rejection of lesbians and gay men as important to their own gender identity. Because of their less hostile reactions to gay people, women will be more likely to interact with them and get to know them on a personal level. Interaction and personal contact with gay people has an effect on the level of homophobia. People who have had personal contact with gays are less prejudicial than those who have not had such contact (Cullen, Wright and Alessandri 2002:122; cf Glassner & Owen 1976:161-176; Herek 1988:451-477), since they have discovered for themselves that the stereotypes of gay people are not true or valid. Contact also brings about better understanding of gays as a group and that in turn lowers the levels of anxiety on account of difference (Millham, San Miguel & Kellogg 1976:3-10).

## **5. PERSONALITY AND HOMOPHOBIA**

Personality also has an influence on the degree of prejudice and, therefore, homophobia. Simpson & Yinger (1972:77), researchers in the field of the social psychology of prejudice, ask the question: "Is there a prejudicial personality that is different from the unprejudicial personality or is prejudice a specific response to a specific stimulus?" The authoritarian personality, already described by Adorno et al in 1950, is found to be more prejudicial (cf Cullen, Wright & Alessandri 2002:122). Authoritarian personalities impose their will on others (Ray 1988:303-316) and generally exhibit traits such as hostility, destructiveness and cynicism which are also found in racial prejudice. Another theory is that people who are extremely prejudicial are prone to anxiety. They try to minimise anxiety by making a complex situation more simple and by finding for themselves a place of belonging (Simpson & Yinger 1972:65-96). If they do not succeed, the resultant feeling of ambiguity makes them anxious. They try and dispell the anxiety by means of prejudicial attitudes towards what they cannot understand.

Cognitive rigidity is one of the attitudes which form part of the prejudicial personality (Adorno et al 1950). Such rigid persons who resist change in their belief systems, tend to be dogmatic. Dogmatism is a closed cognitive structure which protects the person from learning anything new which differs from established social norms. "Rigidity serves the function of controlling or making sense of the ambiguous stimuli with which an individual is faced" (Cullen, Wright & Alessandri 2002:123). According to Simpson & Yinger (1972:65-96), dogmatic persons will be prejudiced towards those who differ from them and reject those who disagree with them.

In 1969 Hans Eysenck and Sybil Eysenck proposed a "schema of personality" in which they distinguished between mainly neurotic and mainly extraverted personalities. Neurotic personalities would then tend to be more prejudicial, whereas extraverted people would be non-prejudicial. The reason for this is that extraverted people are stronger in their resistance to conformity, less likely to feel themselves pressured into accepting dominant social norms, and therefore they would be less conservative and less prejudicial.

A study investigating a possible link between personality and homophobia is that of Johnson, Brems & Alford-Keating (1997). They used the Homophobia Attitude Scale (HAS) developed by Agüero, Bloch & Byrne [1984] along with the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) of Davis (1980) and the FIRO-Cope of Schutz (1962) to establish the connection. The result of the study indicates that people with an empathetic attitude towards others are less likely to be homophobic, whereas religiosity, denial and isolation are factors that contribute to homophobia (cf Cullen, Wright & Alessandri 2002:123).



Making use of a variety of instruments, Cullen, Wright & Alessandri (2002) conducted an investigation into the attitudes and behaviours of those who are and those who are not tolerant of homosexuality. They found the personality variable Openness to Experience “critical in identifying who may or may not be homophobic” (Cullen, Wright & Alessandri 2002:127). Their findings support those of earlier researchers (Hartly 1946; Rokeach 1956; Budner 1961; Maykovich 1975; McCrea & Costa 1985)<sup>2</sup> that tolerance or “openness” can be linked to non-conventionality and that openness and non-conventionality together “have a significant effect on one’s expressed level of homophobia” (Cullen, Wright & Alessandri 2002:128). Contra other previous research (Bagley, Verma, Mallich & Young 1979), they did not find neuroticism and extroversion to be significant factors regarding prejudice (Cullen, Wright & Alessandri 2002:128-129). In accordance with the research of Herek (1986, 1988, 1989, 1998; cf Simon 1996) they also found previous contact with a homosexual person to be an important factor: those with less contact would be more likely to be homophobic. The other way round would also be true: homophobic individuals will be less likely to seek contact with homosexual individuals and if they do have contact they will be more likely to experience it negatively (Cullen, Wright & Alessandri 2002:130; cf Simon 1995).

Consistent with previous research (Herek 1986:563-577; 1988:461-477; Gurwitz & Marcus 1978:47-56) Cullen, Wright & Alessandri (2002:130) found gender to be a significant factor concerning homophobia. Women are less likely to be homophobic than men. They put it as follows:

It was not surprising that Openness to Experience, being a woman, and amount of prior contact with gay and lesbian individuals were correlated with reduced levels of homophobia in light of their close link to each other. More specifically, in the sense that being female could foster increased contact with homosexual individuals, having an open cognitive structure may also allow for greater contact with a gay man or lesbian woman, thus allowing for the demystification of unreasonable fears.

(Cullen, Wright & Alessandri 2002:130)

The study of Cullen, Wright & Alessandri does point to differences in personality and demographics of those more and those less prone to homophobia. They emphasise the need to better understand this phenomenon since violence towards and the victimisation of gays are

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<sup>2</sup> See references in Cullen et al (2002).

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increasing (Cullen, Wright & Alessandri 2002:131; see Otis & Skinner 1996:93-117). Gough (2002:219) puts it as follows: “First hand accounts from gay men depicting a range of victimizing experiences attest to the painful consequences of homophobia whilst sets of statistics on ‘gay-bashing’ and related crimes point to its prevalence.” All of this, of course, causes great physical as well as psychological harm to people. Cullen, Wright & Alessandri (2002:131) conclude: “Therefore, describing the homophobic individual may help researchers better understand negative attitudes towards homosexuality and reduce the violence that many homosexual individuals experience.”

Since the physical, mental and spiritual health of all God’s people is of concern to pastoral caregivers, this information is also crucial to them in their pastoral care of gays. Since attitudes and behaviour based on the gospel message of “loving thy neighbour” are what being church is all about, harmful attitudes of believers towards other believers and non-believers should be eradicated if the faith community is to be true to its calling. A better understanding of the phenomenon which causes this harmful behaviour, is therefore of the utmost importance to the church.

Studies have indicated that homophobia is especially prevalent among young, working-class, heterosexual men where they do sports (see Fine 1987; Lyman 1987) and in the workplace (see Haywood & Mac an Ghail 1997:576-591). A connection between homophobia and misogyny has been pointed out: “[T]o call a boy a ‘poof’ is derogatory but this term, in denoting lack of guts, suggests femininity – weakness, softness and inferiority” (Lees 1987:180; cf Gough 2002:221; see Hunter 1992:367-385). Homophobic comments are often presented as “humour”. This is used to perpetuate “hegemonic masculinities” (Carrigan, Connell & Lee 1985:551-604). This term refers to “currently dominant forms of masculinity which derive from and serve to reinforce divisions between men and between men and women to the benefit of privileged groups, usually white, heterosexual, middle-class males and to the detriment of ‘legitimate’ others, such as women and gay men” (Gough 2002:222; see Gough 1998:25-49; Connell 1995).

Having conducted a group study with young men, Gough (2002:225) identified the following (homophobic) ways of speaking about homosexuality:

- “tolerance”: speaking of tolerance towards gays but at the same time making homophobic statements;
- “privacy”: homosexuality is a private matter and people should be invisible in the public sphere;

- “difference”: gay persons and sexual acts are distinguished; clear distinctions are also made between gay men and lesbian women, and homosociality and homosexuality;
- “individualism”: sexuality is seen as a personal choice, unconnected to ideology and power relations.

Emotions about homosexuality identified in the study were fear, hostility, repulsion and the need to keep it far away from oneself. The conversations were characterised by “pejorative terminology framed by ‘rational’ argument(s)” (Gough 2002:226). Heterosexual masculinity is seen as “normal”, “rational” and “disciplined” whereas heterosexuality is “abnormal”, “irrational” and “undisciplined”. This highlights “the dependence of hegemonic forms of masculinity on the derogated other for self-definition” (Gough 2002:234; see Connell 1995; Coyle & Morgan Sykes 1998:263-284; Gough 1998:25-34). As society becomes increasingly gay- and woman-friendly and politically incorrect talk is frowned upon, enclaves of traditional masculinity such as sports settings or pubs become the locality for reproducing ideology and inequalities surrounding gays and women.

Research has indicated a connection between more contact with gay people and less homophobia. The idea emerged that exposure to gay people can educate people, challenge their prejudice and help to overcome their fears. This is not an easy task on account of “the invisibility of sexuality” (Peel 2002:257). “Unlike other prejudices, heterocentric assumptions are so beguiling they go undetected by even the most equity-sensitive individuals” (Hill 1995:146, in Peel 2002:257). Some strategies for such awareness training include identifying stereotypes and replacing them with facts, encouraging empathy, becoming aware of privilege regarding heterosexuality, and challenging heterosexism. Some trainers found the attitudes and arguments of religious people difficult to deal with. Attitude changing research has shown that it is more difficult to change extreme attitudes than neutral ones (Peel 2004:263; cf Jaspars 1978). According to Oesterreich (2002:288), “[h]omophobia and heterosexism can be serious barriers to a definition of citizenship that provides for the recognition, protection, and participation of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgendered individuals in the society in which they live.”

## **6. INTERNALISED HOMOPHOBIA**

Internalised homophobia has conventionally been seen as “a sexual identity characterized by persistent, structured negative feelings, particularly of shame

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and self-loathing” (Moss 2003:197). This represents a “taking in” of the dominant culture’s attitude towards homosexuality and making it one’s own. Gay and lesbian individuals become the victims of the emotional violence perpetrated against them by society. Psychoanalyst Ralph Roughton (in Moss 2003:201-202) describes the process of internalising homophobia as follows:

My concept of internalized homophobia is that it is not just about sex, but about self-concept. It starts before awareness of sexuality. It begins much earlier with a feeling that you are different, and that this difference is bad and must be kept a secret. This is also a way that internalized homophobia is different from racial, ethnic, or gender stigma. In each of those, you are at least like your family ... The typical gay child does not fit the expectations of his family, realizes that he doesn’t have the right kind of feelings and interests, and feels the ill-defined shame of inadequacy in his very being, without understanding why or what he has done wrong ... What is needed therapeutically is ... to alter one’s basic concept of oneself.

Homophobia is formed in the same way that taboos in society are internalised. Taboos have the function of regulating desires and behaviour, in this case sexual ones. Moss (2003:213) uses the example of dietary taboos. If in South African culture we do not eat dogs, horses or insects, it is not about personal preference: I do not like horse meat as some Dutch people do. It is simply not done, it is “transgressive per se” in the words of Moss. If socialisation has been completely successful, the process and the result of it are practically invisible. People are not aware of how their preferences have been formed. They simply regard it as reality: the way things are and are supposed to be, the way things will always be. “The limits on what one can do, want, and have – on one’s aims and objects – seem not like limits at all. Rather, they seem an integral part of reality; what they prohibit seems to be a violation of reality” (Moss 2003:213). Against this background, homosexual impulses or behaviour do not only constitute a violation of prohibitions that might change in future – “they will appear to violate the permanent order of things” (Moss 2003:214).

Internalised homophobia has both a social and an individual facet. It refers to the internalisation of the dominant culture’s prohibition and exclusion of homosexuality, as well as to the personal ways in which homosexual individuals try to cope with the interdiction against homosexuality.

## 7. HOMOPHOBIA CAUSED BY HETERONORMATIVITY HURTS EVERYONE

Blumenfeld (1992:3) states that sexual minorities are among the most despised groups in the United States. Given the relative openness of this Western society compared to most of the rest of the world, this statement gives one an idea of the state of affairs regarding homosexuality in other countries and cultures of the world. He points out the paradox between the terminology and social practice: "... for many in our society, love of sameness (i.e. *homo*-sexuality) makes people different, whereas love of difference (i.e. *hetero*-sexuality) makes people the same."

Homophobia does damage on two levels: negative attitudes towards the minority group lead to hurtful behaviour such as exclusion, denial of legal protection and physical violence. For those constantly on the receiving end of this, the negative attitudes of others are often internalised. When this happens the emotional growth of these individuals is impeded and they are damaged psychologically. Blumenfeld (1992:3-8; see Tinney 1983; Boswell 1980:18; Riddle 1985)<sup>3</sup> explains how homophobia operates on four different, though interrelated levels:

- *Personal homophobia* indicates a belief system (prejudice) that sexual minorities should be either pitied because they cannot do anything about their unfortunate situation, or hated because they are psychologically disturbed and/or genetically defective since their sexual desires and behaviour go against nature, and despised because they are immoral, sinful and disgusting.
- *Interpersonal homophobia* is when relations among people are determined by prejudice. This results in discrimination. Labelling, telling jokes at the expense of certain groups, verbal or physical harassment which could spill over into violence are some examples. Discrimination could also take the form of exclusion by family, friends, co-workers or the refusal of service providers to deal with individuals on the grounds of their sexual identity.
- *Institutional homophobia* manifests in discrimination by for instance the government, business, educational and religious institutions, professional organisations. Often this discrimination is encoded in laws or policies. Some churches actively preach against homosexuality and exclude people

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<sup>3</sup> For references to Tinney (1983), Boswell (1980), and Riddle (1985), see Blumenfeld (1992:3-8).

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either from the institution as such or from certain offices within the institution on the basis of their sexual identity.

- *Cultural homophobia* is expressed in the social norms and codes of behaviour that perpetuate discrimination and oppression. Sexual minorities are kept as invisible as possible by culture. In this way they are denied their histories, role-models and the freedom and space to be who they are within broader society. They are labelled and stereotyped as a means of social control.

Though oppression of other groups seemingly serves the dominant group, since they have control and power over others, feminist theorists have already pointed out that oppression hurts all involved, the oppressed and the oppressor. The same goes for the oppression of sexual minorities. Though the oppressors protect themselves and their value systems, and gain privileges for themselves that are denied others, oppression also restricts them in different ways.

Blumenfeld (1992:8-14) lists the harmful effects of homophobia to *all* people. It tolerates only rigidly defined gender-roles. All who do not fit into those confines (including “heterosexual” people) are hurt by this and their creativity and possibilities of self-expression are restricted. Given the complexity of life, being human and human sexuality, this reality is not adequately mirrored by the extremely limited traditional gender roles and *one* possibility only for the expression of human sexuality: heterosexual marriage, the only other option being celibacy. Since this is the stance still taken by most churches, one cannot but conclude that most churches display homophobic attitudes which are harmful to people – not only to sexual minorities, but to *all* people.

Homophobic attitudes and behaviour into which people have been conditioned, cause them to hate, reject, judge and otherwise harm other people. If this is contrary to their faith or philosophy of life, this places them in a psychologically and spiritually untenable position of inner conflict and negatively impacts on their psychological and spiritual wholeness and well-being.

Homophobia causes people to experience restrictions and discomfort concerning close relationships with people of the same sex. This impoverishes their personal lives and deprives them of a support system. Single people can be severely affected by this and, if marriage does not provide the warmth and companionship that it is supposed to, married people can also become isolated and lonely, since they have not other recourse. Even in a good marriage the couple can become isolated, which, in turn, is not good for them as individuals and places much pressure on their marriage

which has to provide for *all* their needs for physical, mental, psychological and spiritual intimacy.

Homophobia restricts social interaction. Blumenfeld (1992:10) puts it as follows: “No matter what their constitution, families will continue to produce lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender offspring. The political Right argues loudly that homosexuality poses a direct threat to the stability of the ‘traditional’ nuclear family. In actuality, however, it is homophobia that strains family relationships by restricting communication among family members, loosening the very ties that bind.” Life in the closet is not conducive to good open family relations, neither is the rejection by “traditional parents” (especially fathers) of their own children. These are the fruits of homophobia.

Homophobia leads to stigmatisation, silence and targeting people, not only those who are “different” on account of their sexual identities, but also those who support positive (Christian?) attitudes and non-harmful behaviour towards those who are different. In churches homophobia has led to witch hunts conducted against people who do not support “traditional” values which harm and demean others.

As feminists have pointed out that sexism deprives humanity of the full contribution of half of the population, so homophobia deprives humanity and individuals of the rich and gifted contributions of people who belong to sexual minorities.

Homophobia does not tolerate diversity. This has dire consequences for all: “Homophobia inhibits appreciation of other types of diversity, making it unsafe for everyone because each person has unique traits not considered mainstream or dominant. Therefore, we are all diminished when any one of us is demeaned” (Blumenfeld 1992:13).

To conclude: Homophobia is negative – it is about negative attitudes, negative behaviour and hatred. Much energy goes into maintaining this negativity. This energy could be spent better.

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