

Chapter 1

MAPPING HOMOPHOBIA IN AUSTRALIA

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One-third of the Australian population believe that 'homosexuality is immoral', and this belief is spread in distinct ways across the nation. Using data from a survey of nearly 25,000 Australians, we can 'map' homophobia in Australia. Homophobic attitudes are worst in country areas of Queensland and Tasmania. Men are far more likely than women to feel that homosexuality does not have moral legitimacy, and this gender gap in attitudes persists across age, socioeconomic, educational, and regional divides. Surprisingly, Catholics are the least homophobic of those Australians with a religious affiliation. Finally, homophobic attitudes seem to be improving over time.

Homophobia and heterosexism

Homophobia refers to the fear or hatred of homosexual people and to anti-homosexual beliefs and prejudices. The term 'homophobia' has become a popular descriptor for attitudes, beliefs, stereotypes, and other cognitive and affective responses based on hostility towards and fear of gay men and lesbians. Typical homophobic beliefs include the idea that homosexuality is unnatural, sick, perverse or dangerous, while heterosexuality is natural and normal.

The term homophobia increasingly is complemented by another term, *heterosexism*. This term is useful in emphasising the *system* of injustice and oppression organised around sexuality. Heterosexism refers to collective, institutionalised relations of advantage and disadvantage. It highlights the fact that people

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homosexuality, Catholics are the least homophobic of those Australians with a religious affiliation. This suggests that there is a gap between the official teachings of the Church and the everyday beliefs and values of those people who share its faith.

Finally, what is the future of homophobia in Australia? Anti-homosexual prejudice is likely to decline over time in this country. The belief in the moral unacceptability of homosexuality is most common among the oldest age groups, less common among younger adults, and least common among the youngest adults. Boys in the youngest age group, 14 to 17, do show relatively high levels of homophobia, but this declines by the time they reach early adulthood. This suggests that a belief in the immorality of homosexuality will lessen over time as these cohorts age. While this is heartening, it is also true that homophobia is far from gone. Significant levels of anti-homosexual prejudice remain in Australia, and there is still much work to be done.

Notes

- 1 Sections of this chapter first appeared as a Web Paper produced by the Australia Institute. This 2005 report was co-authored by Michael Flood and Clive Hamilton, both affiliated with the Australia Institute at the time.
- 2 Debbie Epstein and R Johnson, 'On the straight and narrow: The heterosexual presumption, homophobias and schools' in D Epstein, (ed), *Challenging lesbian and gay inequalities in education* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1994), p 198.
- 3 David Plummer, *One of the Boys: Masculinity, Homophobia, and Modern Manhood* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 1999), p 4.
- 4 Gregory M Herek, 'Beyond 'homophobia': Thinking about sexual stigma and prejudice in the twenty-first century', *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*, Vol 1, No 2, (2004), pp 6-24.
- 5 Ibid, p 17.
- 6 Ibid, p 19.
- 7 J Irwin, *The pink ceiling is too low: Workplace experiences of lesbians, gay men and transgender people* (Sydney: Australian Centre for Lesbian and Gay Research, University of Sydney, 1999).
- 8 Attorney General's Department of New South Wales, *You shouldn't have to hide to be safe: A report on Homophobic Hostilities and Violence against Gay Men and Lesbians in New South Wales* (Sydney: NSW Attorney General's Department, 2003).
- 9 L Hillier et al, *Writing Themselves In: A National Report on the Sexuality, Health and Well-Being of Same-Sex attracted Young People* (Melbourne,

36 HOMOPHOBIA: AN AUSTRALIAN HISTORY

Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health & Society, Latrobe University, 2002).

- 10 See for example, Gregory M Herek, JC Cogan, JR Gillis, and EK Glunt, 'Correlates of internalized homophobia in a community sample of lesbians and gay men', *Journal of the Gay and Lesbian Medical Association*, Vol 2 (1998), pp 17-25.
- 11 Epstein and Johnson, 'On the straight and narrow: The heterosexual presumption, homophobias and schools'; Amanda Nickson, 'Keeping a straight face: Schools, students, and homosexuality', Part 1, in Catherine Beavis and Louise Laskey, (eds), *Schooling and sexualities: Teaching for a positive sexuality* (Geelong: Deakin Centre for Education and Change, Deakin University, 1996).
- 12 Mairtin Mac an Ghaill, *The Making of Men: Masculinities, Sexualities and schooling* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1994), p 167.
- 13 Warren J Blumenfield, (ed), *Homophobia: How We All Pay the Price* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992).
- 14 CE Rissel, J Richters, AE Grulich, RO de Visser, and AMA Smith, 'Sex in Australia: Attitudes towards sex in a representative sample of adults', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, Vol 27, No 2 (2003), pp 118-123.
- 15 Shaun Wilson, 'Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender identification and attitudes to same-sex relationships in Australia and the United States', *People and Place*, Vol 12, No 4 (2004), pp 12-21.
- 16 Gregory M Herek, 'Sexual prejudice' website. <http://psychology.ucdavis.edu/rainbow/html/sexual_prejudice.html> (accessed 31 March 2008).
- 17 L Hillier, L Harrison and K Bowditch, "'Neverending Love" and "Blowing Your Load": The Meanings of Sex to Rural Youth', *Sexualities*, Vol 2, No 1, (February 1999), pp 69-88; J Little, (2002) "'Riding the Rural Love Train': Heterosexuality and the Rural Community', *Sociologia Ruralis*, Vol 43, Issue 4 (2002), pp 401-417.
- 18 Wilson, 'Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender identification and attitudes to same-sex relationships in Australia and the United States', p 14.
- 19 Note that northern Sydney, central Sydney, Melbourne north and outer north-east, western Brisbane and Adelaide eastern all have percentages only slightly higher than Melbourne central.
- 20 Gregory M Herek and Eric K Glunt, 'Interpersonal Contact and Heterosexuals' Attitudes Toward Gay Men: Results From a National Survey', *Journal of Sex Research*, Vol 30, No 3 (August 1993), pp 239-244.
- 21 Gregory M Herek and JP Capitanio, "'Some of my best friends": Intergroup contact, concealable stigma, and heterosexuals' attitudes

- toward gay men and lesbians', *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, Vol 22, No 4 (1996), pp 412-424.
- 22 Several other city regions have similar percentages.
- 23 Gregory M Herek, 'On heterosexual masculinity: Some psychical consequences of the social construction of gender and sexuality', *American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol 29, No 5 (1986), pp 563-577; Gregory M Herek, 'Heterosexuals' attitudes toward lesbians and gay men: Correlates and gender differences', *Journal of Sex Research*, Vol 25, No 4, (1988), pp 451-477; Gregory M Herek, 'Gender gaps in public opinion about lesbians and gay men', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol 66, No 1 (2002), pp 40-66.
- 24 Michael Flood, Homophobia and Masculinities Among Young Men (Lessons in Becoming a Straight Man). Presentation to teachers, Professional Development Training, O'Connell Education Centre, Canberra, 22 April 1997. <www.xyonline.net/misc/homophobia.html>.
- 25 M Davies, 'Correlates of negative attitudes toward gay men: sexism, male role norms, and male sexuality', *Journal of Sex Research*, Vol 41, No 3 (2004), pp 259-266; Herek, 'Sexual prejudice'. <http://psychology.ucdavis.edu/rainbow/html/sexual_prejudice.html> (accessed 31 March 2008). E Swank and L Raiz, 'Explaining comfort with homosexuality among social work students: the impact of demographic, contextual, and attitudinal factors.', *Journal of Social Work Education*, Vol 43, No 2 (2007), pp 257(23).
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- 27 J Richters and C Rissel, *Doing It Down Under: The sexual lives of Australians* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2005), pp 29-33.
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- 29 Herek, 'Sexual Prejudice and Gender', pp 262-263; S Raja and JP Stokes, 'Assessing Attitudes Towards Lesbians and Gay Men: The Modern Homophobia Scale', *Journal of Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Identity*, Vol 3, No 2 (1998), pp 115-116.
- 30 Flood, Homophobia and Masculinities Among Young Men <www.xyonline.net/misc/homophobia.html>.
- 31 M Flood, 'Pathways to manhood: The social and sexual ordering of young men's lives', *Health Education Australia*, Vol 2, No 2 (2002), pp 24-30.

38 HOMOPHOBIA: AN AUSTRALIAN HISTORY

- 32 Plummer, *One of the Boys*, pp 67-68.
- 33 Anoop Nayak, and Mary Jane Kehily, 'Masculinities and Schooling: Why are Young Men so Homophobic?' in Deborah L Steinberg, Debbie Epstein, and Richard Johnson, (eds), *Border Patrols: Policing the Boundaries of Heterosexuality* (London: Cassell, 1997).
- 34 Ibid, p 144.
- 35 Gregory M Herek and JP Capitanio, 'Black heterosexuals' attitudes toward lesbians and gay men in the United States', *Journal of Sex Research*, Vol 32, No 2 (1995), pp 95-105.
- 36 A Bryant, 'Changes in attitudes toward women's roles: Predicting gender-role traditionalism among college students', *Sex Roles*, (February 2003), Vol 48, No 3/4.
- 37 Wilson, 'Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender identification and attitudes to same-sex relationships in Australia and the United States', p 20.
- 38 Herek, 'Gender gaps in public opinion about lesbians and gay men', pp 40-66; and Herek and Capitanio, 'Some of my best friends', p 412-424.
- 39 Herek, 'Sexual prejudice' website. <http://psychology.ucdavis.edu/rainbow/html/sexual_prejudice.html> (accessed 31 March 2008); Swank and Raiz, 'Explaining comfort with homosexuality among social work students: the impact of demographic, contextual, and attitudinal factors', p 257(23).
- 40 There are a variety of psychometric scales for measuring homophobia. See the following for a review: Gregory M Herek, 2008, 'The Attitudes Towards Lesbians and Gay Men (ATLG) Scale', (accessed 31 March 2008). <<http://psychology.ucdavis.edu/rainbow/html/atlg.html>>; S Raja and JP Stokes, 'Assessing Attitudes Towards Lesbians and Gay Men: The Modern Homophobia Scale', *Journal of Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Identity*, Vol 3, No 2 (1998), pp 113-134; Paul Van de Ven, Laurel Bornholt, and Michael Bailey, 'Measuring Cognitive, Affective, and Behavioral Components of Homophobic Reaction', *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, Vol 25, No 2 (1996), pp 155-179.
- 41 See, for example, S Sharpe, "'It's Just Really Hard to Come to Terms With': Young people's views on homosexuality", *Sex Education*, Vol 2, No 3, (November 2002), pp 263-277.