Correlates of Negative Attitudes Toward Homosexuals in Heterosexual College Students

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Negative attitudes toward homosexuals were assessed in 103 heterosexual college students. On the average, 17% of the sample agreed or strongly agreed with each of 40 negative statements about homosexuals. Cronbach's alpha and a principal components analysis indicated that the attitude scale was unidimensional. Methodological improvements were made in the assessment of the correlates of negative attitudes toward homosexuals. Such attitudes were inversely related to age, academic performance, and the use of principled moral reasoning. They were positively related to traditional attitudes toward men, women, and the equality of men and women. Compared to females, males' attitudes toward homosexuals were more negative, and their attitudes toward men, women, and the equality of men and women were more traditional. However, the correlates of negative attitudes toward homosexuals were similar for males and for females. It was concluded that negative attitudes toward homosexuals are part of a larger belief system regarding conventional social order.

Despite evidence that homosexuality is, in part, neuroendocrinologically determined (Ellis & Ames, 1987; Money, 1987); that homosexuals are equivalent to heterosexuals in expressed psychological symptomatology (Kurdek, 1987); and that coupled gays and lesbians report levels of relationship quality indistinguishable from those reported by married heterosexual couples (Howard, Blumstein, & Schwartz, 1986, 1987; Kurdek & Schmitt, 1986), nega-

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1 I would like to thank Mike Hennessy and an anonymous reviewer of this journal for their comments on an earlier draft of this paper and Anne Stericker for her assistance in devising the attitudes toward men scale.
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tive attitudes toward homosexuals still prevail. Such attitudes are of grave concern in light of evidence that violence against homosexuals is a serious national problem aggravated by the current AIDS crisis (Walter, 1986).

Although research on negative attitudes toward homosexuals is in its early phases, there is evidence that these attitudes are more prevalent in males than in females (Kite, 1984); are inversely related to age, educational level, and personal experience with homosexuals (Herek, 1984a); and are positively related to conservative religious values, conservative views regarding sexuality, traditional attitudes regarding the roles of men and women, the avoidance of intimacy in male-male relationships, authoritarianism, intolerance of ambiguity, and cognitive rigidity (Devlin & Cowan, 1985; Herek, 1984a; Kite & Deaux, 1986; MacDonald & Games, 1974; Thompson, Grisanti, & Pleck, 1985; Whitley, 1987).

The first purpose of this study was descriptive. Surprisingly, previous studies have not routinely presented data on the overall extent of negative attitudes toward homosexuals, although a comparison between sample means and total possible scores indicates that most samples score either in the midrange or toward the negative end (Kite & Deaux, 1986; MacDonald & Games, 1974; Shields & Harriman, 1984; Whitley, 1987). The overall level of negative attitudes toward homosexuals was assessed in the present sample of college students, and items receiving particularly strong negative reactions were identified.

Although several authors (Herek, 1984a,b; Millham, San Miguel, & Kellogg, 1976; Plasek & Allard, 1984) have argued that attitudes toward homosexuals are complex and multifaceted, factor analyses of "homophobia" scales have typically yielded one very large Condemnation-Tolerance factor that accounts for most of the variance (Herek, 1984b; Kite & Deaux, 1986; Millham et al., 1976). Thus, throughout this study, attitudes toward homosexuals are assumed to be unidimensional. They were assessed by items presented by Herek (1984b) because these items are derived from several previous scales and because they cover a range of beliefs as well as affective reactions (Plasek & Allard, 1984). Although several studies have suggested that attitudes toward gays are more negative than attitudes toward lesbians (Herek, 1984a,b), and that heterosexuals may be more hostile toward homosexuals of their own gender (Herek, 1984a; Kite, 1984), the factor structure of items toward these two target groups as well as the correlates of negative attitudes toward each target group are generally similar (Herek, 1984b; Kite & Deaux, 1986; MacDonald & Games, 1974). Because the second purpose of this study was to examine the correlates of negative attitudes toward homosexuals, referents for all items were generic "homosexuals."

The examination of the correlates of negative attitudes toward homosexuals was made with several methodological refinements over previous studies.