

Homophobia: Conceptual, Definitional, and Value Issues

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The construct of homophobia and the psychometric properties of instruments purporting to measure homophobia are critically evaluated. The history of the term and its various definitions are briefly reviewed. We conclude that existing measures of homophobia have been inadequately psychometrically evaluated and therefore it is not clear whether currently this construct can be accurately measured. It is also concluded that the construct of homophobia, as it is usually used, makes an illegitimately pejorative evaluation of certain open and debatable value positions, much like the former disease construct of homosexuality. Finally, proposals for theory development and construct definition in the domain of reactions to homosexuals and homosexuality are provided.

KEY WORDS: homophobia; homosexuality; homosexuals; measurement; values.

INTRODUCTION

Homophobia is a potentially important construct, given the significant amount of violence and other violations of rights that homosexuals experience and the relatively recent complexities that AIDS contributes to reactions to homosexuals and homosexuality. This paper examines the construct of homophobia. In particular, the historical context which contributed to its emergence is briefly described. We examine its definition and usage and whether, somewhat ironically, it, like past psychiatric definitions of "homosexuality," implicitly contains an illegitimately pejorative evaluation of certain open and debatable value positions. We also critically

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review extant measurement instruments of homophobia to assess their psychometric adequacy. Although other reliability and other validity issues are important, as these determine the extent to which it can be said that we possess the ability to measure homophobia, special attention is paid to the concurrent, content, and construct validity of these instruments, as these psychometric properties are critical for ascertaining exactly what an instrument is actually measuring. We conclude that extant instruments purporting to measure homophobia suffer from numerous psychometric problems. Finally, several proposals for theory development and construct definition in the domain of reactions to homosexuals and homosexuality are advanced.

A BRIEF HISTORY

In 1973 the diagnostic category of "Homosexuality" was eliminated by a vote of 5854 to 3810 from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) of the American Psychiatric Association (Bayer, 1981). In the first edition of the DSM homosexuality was included as one of the sexual disorders which were classified among the Sociopathic Personality Disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 1952). Sociopathic disorders were characterized by a lack of distress or anxiety despite the presence of severe pathology. This allowed homosexuality to be classified as a mental disorder despite the homosexual's possible satisfaction with his or her sexual orientation. In the second edition of the DSM (American Psychiatric Association, 1968) homosexuality was reclassified as a Sexual Deviation, among the Nonpsychotic Disorders. The category, Sexual Deviation, included individuals whose sexual interests are directed toward objects other than persons of the opposite sex, or toward acts not usually associated with coitus, or toward acts involving coitus under bizarre circumstances. It was noted that, although these individuals may be disturbed by their sexual behavior, they are unable to substitute "normal sexual behavior." In 1973, when Homosexuality was eliminated from the DSM, the third edition of the manual contained the diagnosis Ego-Dystonic Homosexuality, which described individuals with a sustained pattern of overt homosexual arousal that is unwanted or distressing, accompanied by a desire to acquire heterosexual arousal. [It is interesting to note that in the International Classification of Diseases (1980, 9th ed.) homosexuality is still classified as a disease.]

Writing about the 1973 decision and the dispute that surrounded it, Bayer (1981) contended that these changes were produced by political