Bi-Negativity

The Stigma Facing Bisexual Men

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SUMMARY. The purpose of this study was to examine the attitudes of heterosexual college students about bisexuality. Although there is considerable information about attitudes toward lesbians and gay men, much less is known about the structure and degree of attitudes about bisexual men and women. This article focuses on the results regarding bisexual men, who were rated more negatively than bisexual women, gay men, or lesbians. Some of the potential reasons for and implications of this finding are discussed. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-342-9678. E-mail address: <getinfo@haworthpressinc.com> Website: <http://www.HaworthPress.com>]*

KEYWORDS. Attitudes, biphobia, bisexual men, bisexuality

This essay is an expanded and revised version of an article I published in 1997 which received an inordinate amount of attention. I have been writing articles on sexual identity development and lesbian and gay issues in health care for the past several years with little fuss. However, when this article was published in the *Archives of Sexual Behavior* (Eliason, 1997), I was inundated with phone calls from reporters and even talk show hosts who wanted to discuss bisexuality. Apparently, the ''bisexual moment of fame'' has arrived. This essay emphasizes the portion of my research study that focused on bisexual men.

Until recently, bisexual people have been a largely invisible segment of both the general population and lesbian and gay communities. In spite of work by Sigmund Freud, Alfred Kinsey, and many other researchers that conceptualizes sexuality as a continuum, and even proposes that bisexuality is the ''natural state'' of most human beings, many people still view sexual identity as a dichotomous variable–that is, people are either homosexual or heterosexual (Ochs, 1996). This dichotomization effectively erases all other points on the continuum, implying that heterosexuality and homosexuality are polar opposites, clearly distinguishable from one another (Kaplan, 1995; Paul, 1985; Udis-Kessler, 1990). Although the reduction of sexual identity to an either/or, ''us versus them'' framework helped lesbians and gay men to organize politically and socially, based on the belief that they were a cohesive minority group, the assumption of sexual sameness ignored important differences of race, class, age, religion, and other aspects of identity. It also contributed to a number of bi-negative attitudes, including the notion that bisexuality doesn't really exist.

As lesbian and gay people became more visible on college campuses, in the media, and in society at large in the 1970s, studies of ''homophobia'' (a

term coined by psychologist George Weinberg in 1972 to describe negative attitudes about homosexuality and/or homosexual people) began to appear in the social scientific literature. The naming of homophobia was empowering, as it put the onus for negative attitudes about lesbians and gay men on the individuals holding such beliefs and removed the blame from those with the negatively perceived characteristic. This was an important first step toward ending societal prejudice and discrimination based on sexual identity, and in the past twenty years, studies of homophobia have become increasingly common. However, the concept of homophobia is not without its limitations. It can lead to too much attention being focused on individual prejudices and not enough on the societal institutions that create the climate for negative attitudes to flourish (Kitzinger, 1987). Additionally, homophobia is not a true phobia in the psychological sense of the word. A phobia is an irrational, uncontrollable fear that leads to physiological distress, whereas homophobia is often rational and intentional and fueled by anger, hostility, or hatred, rather than fear. And unlike many people with phobias, homophobes usually do not want to change (Haaga, 1991). For these reasons, I have recently decided not to use the term ''homophobia'' in my own writing, opting instead for ''homo-negativity'' or the more cumbersome, but descriptive, ''negative attitudes about lesbians and gay men.'' In this same vein, I will use ''bi-negativity'' to refer to negative attitudes about bisexuals.

People who identify as bisexual have historically not been very visible in society. If they are in an other-sex relationship(s), they are perceived as heterosexual and if in a same-sex relationship(s), they are seen as lesbian or gay. Many writers have also refused to recognize bisexuality, maintaining that everyone really belongs to one of the two ''legitimate'' categories. Consequently, studies of homo-negativity have rarely addressed bisexuality or bi-negativity. Some researchers assume that bi-negativity, if it exists at all, is simply a variant of homo-negativity–that is, bisexuals only encounter hostility when in a same-sex relationship, just as a lesbian or gay man experiences homophobia. However, the fact that many lesbians and gay men have negative attitudes about bisexuals demonstrates that homo-negativity and bi-negativity are not identical (Rust, 1995).

There are very few published empirical studies of bisexuality or bi-negativity. Anecdotal information and personal accounts of bisexual experiences are provided in anthologies such as Thomas Geller's *Bisexuality: A Reader and Sourcebook* (1990), Loraine Hutchins and Lani Kaahumanu's *Bi Any Other Name: Bisexual People Speak Out* (1991), Elizabeth Reba Weise's *Closer to Home: Bisexuality and Feminism* (1992), Naomi Tucker's *Bisexual*

Politics: Theories, Queries, and Visions (1995), The Bisexual Anthology Collective's *Plural Desires: Writing Bisexual Women's Realities* (1995), and The Off Pink Collective's *Bisexual Horizons: Politics, Histories, Lives* (1996). These books suggest that stereotypes of bisexuals are widespread, such as the myths that bisexuals are confused about their sexuality, that they are gay or lesbian people who lack the courage to come out, that they are promiscuous and unable to commit to any one person, that they have more than one partner at a time, that they spread AIDS to heterosexuals and lesbians, and that they are obsessed with sex (anything that moves!). As important as these anthologies are, though, there is also a need for empirical research on issues related to bisexuality. Paula Rust (1993a, 1993b, 1996) is one of the few empirical researchers who takes bisexual identities seriously. However, her focus until recently has been on the attitudes of lesbians toward bisexual women and how bisexual women achieve a sense of identity. Although her studies add critical information to the literature on sexual identity formation and change, they do not consider the attitudes of gay men or heterosexuals toward bisexuals, nor do they provide information about specific attitudes about bisexual men.

Although bisexuality was not the original focus, some of my earlier work suggested that bi-negativity might be a serious problem among non-bisexuals. For example, in one study (Eliason, 1996), I found that 1,130 heterosexual respondents to a campus climate survey felt that bisexuals were less socially acceptable than lesbians or gay men. Thirty percent of the heterosexual sample rated bisexuals as ''somewhat'' or ''very unacceptable,'' compared to 22% who rated lesbians as ''unacceptable'' and 23% who rated gay men as ''unacceptable.'' Of the 58 lesbian and gay respondents to the survey, 5% considered bisexuals to be ''unacceptable.''

In another study, Salome Raheim and I found that heterosexual nursing students, 94% of whom were female, reported that they often felt uncomfortable around people who had different sexual identities than themselves (Eliason & Raheim, 1998). They were equally uncomfortable around bisexuals (43%) and lesbians (44%), but somewhat less uncomfortable around gay men (35%). One could speculate that gay men were the only group that were not perceived as a potential sexual threat. However, the reasons that the students gave for their discomfort were similar for gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals: lack of exposure to people in these categories, lack of knowledge about sexual orientation and identities, disapproval of same-sex relationships, and feeling personally endangered. One student made a comment specific to

bisexuality: "I feel they are the people who spread AIDS. I think they should be either heterosexual or homosexual."

Neither of the above studies considered male and female bisexuals separately. Therefore, I decided to design a study that would collect more detailed information about heterosexual students' attitudes toward bisexuality. Empirical research certainly has its limitations, but it can also greatly increase our understanding of the concept of bi-negativity. Most of the previous writing on bi-negativity consists of bisexuals' personal accounts of discrimination. As useful as these narratives are, they are necessarily one-sided perceptions and can only describe the experiences of that individual. These narratives also focus primarily on bisexual women's experiences, especially with lesbians, and provide little information about bisexual men. I decided to survey the attitudes of heterosexual college students to begin to explore how pervasive bi-negativity might be. Paper and pencil surveys are easier and more convenient than face-to-face interviews and also allow the respondent to be anonymous, which increases the possibility of honest responding on sensitive topics. College students may not be representative of the population as a whole, because white middle- and upper-class individuals have more opportunities to attend college. However, they do represent a group of people who may sway public opinion in the future.

In this essay, I will compare the results of my findings about bi-negativity to studies of homo-negativity to determine whether the same demographic variables are related to both, and to determine the degree of overlap between bi-negativity and homo-negativity. There have been several empirical research studies of the predictors or correlates of homo-negativity. I summarized these in a recent article (Eliason, 1995), and found that the most frequently identified correlates include:

- gender (men are usually more negative than women)
- gender role ideology (people with traditional views of gender, who believe that women and men have very separate roles in society, are more negative about homosexuality than people with more open views)
- personality traits (a few studies have found that people with rigid, authoritarian, or dogmatic views are more negative about homosexuality)
- religion (members of fundamentalist and conservative religions are more likely to be homo-negative than members of progressive religions or people with no religious affiliation)
- geographic region (people from the south and midwest tend to have more negative attitudes than people from either coast, and rural residents tend to be more negative than urban residents)

- age (adolescent and young adult males are the most likely to be homo-negative, and elders tend to be more negative than middle-aged adults)
- education (people with lower levels of formal education tend to be more homo-negative than people with a higher education)
- familiarity with a gay or lesbian person (although one recent Harris poll found no relationship between knowing a person who is gay/lesbian and negative attitudes, several other studies have found such a relation-ship)

All of these studies are somewhat suspect, because the measurement of homo-negativity is nearly as varied and unscientific as the meaning of the term homophobia. Survey instruments often mix affective statements (such as expressions of disgust, revulsion, and fear) with cognitive statements (such as attitudes about workplace discrimination and civil rights), thereby measuring two very different things. Most of the attitude scales also rely on a single score to determine whether or not someone is homophobic, thus erasing differences between individual respondents and making meaningful comparisons between studies extremely difficult. Some surveys even use stereotypical language that might perpetuate homo-negativity.

At the time of my study, there were no published questionnaires about attitudes toward bisexual people. If bi-negativity is the same as homo-negativity, one would expect that the same variables would predict bi-negativity. That is, a young male with a low level of education from the rural midwest who belongs to a fundamentalist religion and does not know any gay, lesbian, or bisexual people would likely express comparable levels of bi-negativity and homo-negativity. There should not be a significant difference in ratings of bisexual and gay men. The next two sections will describe how I went about studying this question.

SAMPLE

Students enrolled in two undergraduate courses in psychology at a large midwestern university served as the participant pool. These courses are general education requirement electives, thus students from a wide variety of majors were enrolled. Participation in the study was voluntary and the surveys were anonymous and completed outside of class. Out of a potential pool of 320 students, 255 completed surveys. Twenty-six of these were not included in the data analysis because the respondents indicated that they were lesbian, gay, bisexual, or uncertain of their sexuality. Thus the final sample

consisted of 229 self-identified heterosexual students, 170 of whom were female and 59 male (none indicated that they were transgendered). Women students predominate because the courses surveyed–classes on growth and development–attract substantially more women than men.

INSTRUMENT

The author-designed survey contained questions about demographic variables, such as age, gender, race, sexual identity, and religion; attitudes about and experiences with people who identify as bisexual; attitudes about and experiences with people who identify as gay or lesbian; the Beliefs about Sexual Minorities Scale (BSM; Eliason & Raheim, 1996); and a set of 23 statements describing common stereotypes about bisexuality that the students were asked to agree or disagree with. These statements were worded both positively and negatively to discourage respondents from answering in a particular way and not really reading the items. The statements were based on a review of the literature on bisexual stereotypes and subsequent feedback from a person who is a bisexual political activist and academic. The final revised instrument took about 15 minutes to complete.

The Beliefs about Sexual Minorities Scale provided respondents with six statements depicting a range of attitudes about sexual minorities, and asked them to check the one that most closely resembled their own current beliefs. For this study, four different versions of the BSM were used in order to collect information about beliefs toward lesbians, gay men, bisexual women, and bisexual men. The statements were as follows for each sexual identity group:

- celebration: I believe that lesbians, gay men, bisexual women, or bisexual men (L/G/BW/BM) contribute in a positive and unique way to society.
- acceptance: L/G/BW/BM people deserve equal protection and the same rights as heterosexual people.
- tolerance: L/G/BW/BM people have a right to exist, but should keep their sexuality private and hidden.
- disapproval: L/G/BW/BM lifestyles go against my religious or moral beliefs.
- disgust: L/G/BW/BM people are disgusting and should not be given any rights.
- hatred: I despise L/G/BW/BM people and believe their lifestyles should be punished.

Raheim and I have used this scale in several studies and found it to be a useful and reliable measure of the range of people's attitudes. Although the scale is ordered from the most positive to the most negative, it is not strictly linear because the items represent qualitatively different types of attitudes that may have vastly different underlying reasons. For example, the person who disapproves of bisexuality on the grounds of religious beliefs may have quite different motivations from the person who feels disgust about homosexual sexual practices or who hates bisexuals because of unacknowledged sexual issues of his/her own.

THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY

The respondents ranged in age from 18 to 34, with a mean age of 20.6. Not surprisingly, 60% of the sample fell into the 18- to 20-year-old age bracket, which is typical for lower-level undergraduate courses at this university. Over 95% were European American, and only a few already had an undergraduate degree (2%). Eighty-five students (37%) indicated that they belonged to a fundamentalist religion, which was much higher than I expected, given that the school does not have a strong religious character.

Few of the respondents knew anyone who had come out to them as bisexual: 76% of the sample said that they did not have any bisexual friends and 64% had no bisexual acquaintances. Most indicated that they had little (59%) or no (14%) knowledge about bisexuality. When asked how acceptable bisexuality was to them personally, they rated bisexual men as much less acceptable than bisexual women. The list below shows the percent of students who rated each group as "very unacceptable":

- Bisexual men: 26%
- Gay men: 21%
- Lesbians: 14%
- Bisexual women: 12%

Conversely, more students rated lesbians and gay men as "very acceptable" (22% for both groups), than bisexual women (14%) or bisexual men (12%). The responses to the BSM revealed a very similar picture: while very few respondents checked "celebration" for any of the sexual identity groups (only 6-7%), a larger segment of the sample marked "acceptance" for lesbians and gay men (53%) than for bisexual women and men (46% for both).

Likewise, "disapproval" on the basis of moral or religious grounds was greatest for bisexual men (21%), followed by bisexual women (18%), gay men (15%), and lesbians (14%). This is rather puzzling, since, to my knowledge, neither fundamentalist biblical interpretations, nor the rhetoric of the Religious Right, makes much of a distinction between lesbians, gay men, bisexual women, and bisexual men. The categories of disgust and hatred were rarely endorsed, thankfully, but here again, the most hostility was directed against bisexual men (2.5% versus less than 1% for the other groups).

When asked how likely it was that they would have a sexual relationship with a bisexual partner, 3.5% (five men and three women) indicated that they had already done so. Other students considered the possibility of such a relationship to be "very unlikely" (52%) or "somewhat unlikely" (25%). Only 9% thought it was "very likely" that they would choose a relationship with a bisexual partner.

Table 1 lists the stereotypical statements about bisexuality provided on the questionnaire and shows the students' responses. The lack of knowledge about bisexuality was evident in the high rates of "don't know" answers, ranging from 9-57%, depending on the item. For many of the stereotypes, the students were equally divided. For example, 27% agreed and 27% disagreed that bisexuals have more sexual partners than heterosexuals, and 31% agreed and 33% disagreed that bisexuals spread AIDS to heterosexuals (the rest didn't know). Some of the stereotypes garnered more support. For example, a majority of respondents believed that "bisexuals have more flexible attitudes about sex than heterosexuals," and didn't feel that "bisexuals are just gay and lesbian people who are afraid to admit they are gay." At the same time, a majority didn't think that "bisexuals are more psychologically well-adjusted" than heterosexuals or gays/lesbians, and felt that "bisexual rights are the same as gay and lesbian rights." The bottom line seems to be that heterosexual students do not have clear-cut beliefs about bisexuals.

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN RESPONDING

In many studies, heterosexual men have been found to be more homo-negative than heterosexual women, so I divided the sample by gender to determine if the men and women would have different levels of bi-negativity. Even though the men in the survey were slightly older than the women (means of 21.4 and 20.3 years, respectively), this factor did not seem to lead

TABLE 1. Percent of the sample who agreed, disagreed, or did not know about stereotypical statements about bisexual people.

Statement	Agree	Disagree	D.K.
Bisexuals tend to have more sexual partners than heterosexuals	27%	27%	46%
Bisexuals tend to have more sexual partners than gays or lesbians	20%	23%	57%
Bisexuals have more flexible attitudes about sex than heterosexuals	76%	7%	17%
People are probably born bisexual	26%	38%	36%
Bisexuals are more likely to have more than one sexual partner at a time than heterosexuals	39%	33%	28%
Bisexuals are more likely to have more than one sexual partner at a time than gays/lesbians	27%	33%	41%
Bisexuals are more psychologically well-adjusted than heterosexuals	3%	63%	34%
Bisexuals are more psychologically well-adjusted than gays/lesbians	4%	52%	44%
Bisexuals are more confused about their sexuality than heterosexuals	39%	35%	25%
Bisexuals are more confused about their sexuality than gays/lesbians	30%	38%	32%
Bisexuals are just gay and lesbian people who are afraid to admit they are gay	7%	69%	23%
Gender of sexual partners should not be an issue–we should all select partners based on personality or other human qualities	36%	54%	9%

TABLE 1 (continued)

Statement	Agree	Disagree	D.K.
A bisexual person is likely to leave you for someone of the other sex	15%	29%	56%
Bisexual rights are the same as gay and lesbian rights	55%	8%	36%
Bisexuals need to have political organizations separate from gay and lesbian groups	24%	24%	52%
Bisexuals are more accepted in society than gays/lesbians	32%	45%	23%
Bisexuals are less accepted in society than gays/lesbians	21%	48%	31%
Bisexuals have more privilege in society than gays/lesbians	19%	44%	38%
Bisexuals spread AIDS to the lesbian community	24%	34%	42%
Bisexuals spread AIDS to heterosexuals	31%	33%	36%
Bisexuals are just going through a phase or experimenting with sex	12%	45%	43%
Bisexuals have the best of both worlds	12%	50%	38%

them to have more positive attitudes, as might normally be expected. The heterosexual men showed a greater tendency to believe in a number of stereotypes about bisexuality: that bisexuals have more sexual partners than heterosexuals and gays/lesbians, are more likely to have more than one sexual partner at a time than heterosexuals, are really gays/lesbians who are afraid to admit that they are gay, spread AIDS to lesbians and heterosexuals, and are more accepted in society than gays/lesbians.

There was no difference between heterosexual women and men on the mean number of bisexual, gay, or lesbian friends and acquaintances, but men were more likely to report that they would have a sexual relationship with a bisexual woman. While seemingly a positive attitude, for a number of the men, this willingness to be sexually involved with a bisexual woman probably stems from the stereotype that bisexual women need or want to be

involved with a man and a woman at the same time, thereby enabling the man to have sex with two female partners. The questionnaire did not specifically ask for explanations, but three men wrote comments to the effect that a female bisexual partner would allow them to experience a threesome.[1] The different attitudes toward bisexual men and women were also apparent on the BSM. Heterosexual men gave more negative ratings to gay men, lesbians, and bisexual men than did heterosexual women, but there was no statistical difference between the men's and women's ratings of the acceptability of bisexual women. Thus the heterosexual men's bi-negativity appears to be directed largely at bisexual men, just as their homo-negativity is directed more at gay men.

Several factors help to explain why heterosexual men may be more hostile toward gay and bisexual men than heterosexual women are toward lesbians and bisexual women. Men may have less experience with, and thus a greater concern about, being "hit on" by another man, whereas women are often relatively experienced at turning down unwanted advances from men, and as a result, have developed effective strategies that give them confidence in their ability to deal with an unwanted advance from a woman. Men also may perceive sexual advances by other men as a threat to their masculinity, where-as women may consider sexual advances by other women as "flattering." That men are often intimidated by sexual advances from other men was recently highlighted by the widely publicized murders of Matthew Shepard and Billy Jo Gaither, both of whom were killed by heterosexual men who subsequently argued that they felt threatened by the murder victims' homo-sexuality. This "homosexual panic" defense has been used by many lawyers to obtain lesser sentences for gay bashers, whose crimes are minimized because the gay or bisexual man supposedly "asked for it."

Some heterosexual men also stigmatize gay and bisexual men because of their perceived relationship to HIV/AIDS. That is, they assume that all gay and bisexual men are HIV-positive because they believe that same-sex sexual activity (anal sex, specifically) causes AIDS. Bisexual men may actually be even more threatening than gay men to many heterosexual men because bisexuals are not readily marked as non-heterosexual. Stereotypes about gay men include a number of physical indicators: "effeminate" gestures, limp wrists, a lisp, lack of athletic ability, and so on. But there are no similar bi male stereotypes, and thus, in the general perception of heterosexual men, bisexual men represent a hidden danger and a direct challenge to the creation of a clear, "us-them" sexual division.

FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH NEGATIVE ATTITUDES ABOUT BISEXUAL MEN AND WOMEN

I used a type of statistical analysis called a multiple regression analysis that identifies the potential contributing factors to a particular attitude or behavior. Contributors to negative attitudes about bisexual women included a lack of bisexual friends and acquaintances, younger age, and belonging to a conservative religion. The factors that correlated with negative attitudes about bisexual men were the same, but also included male gender. Homo-negativity was strongly related to bi-negativity, and in fact, was the strongest relationship–a respondent who was homo-negative was almost always bi-negative as well. This was true for all the women in the sample, but there was a small subset of men who expressed little animosity toward lesbians, gay men, and bisexual women, but who were very hostile toward bisexual men. Some authors have argued that many homo-negative people are prone to "generalized prejudice," suggesting that they have a personality style or particularly rigid belief system that leads them to reject or fear people who differ from them in any way, such as by race, gender, class, or sexuality (Bierly, 1985; Eliason, 1998; Ficarrotto, 1990). This hypothesis was not tested in this survey, but if homo-negativity and bi-negativity typically go hand-in-hand (as my study suggests), it offers support for the theory.

CONCLUSIONS

As a group, heterosexual students were quite divided on their attitudes about the acceptability of bisexual women. Overall, 50% rated bisexual women as "acceptable" and 50% rated them as "unacceptable." Attitudes about bisexual men were more negative, with 61% considering them "unacceptable." This finding was more pronounced when the sample was divided by gender–many heterosexual men rated bisexual men as "very unacceptable," but were more tolerant or even accepting of bisexual women. Heterosexual men also tended to disapprove more of gay men than of lesbians.

Why are negative attitudes about another person's private, consensual sexual behavior so prevalent? One reason is that these stereotypical beliefs generally have benefits for the holder, such as a sense of moral superiority, the ability to fit into a peer group, a defense against one's own unacknowledged sexual desires and/or anxieties, and the reduction of uncertainty by reinforcing an "us-them" paradigm. In addition, homo-negativity and bi-negativity serve to maintain the patriarchal status quo, keeping heterosexual

men in positions of perceived power. This heterosexual privilege makes such negative attitudes very resistant to change. Visibility itself is not sufficient, as the history of different civil rights movements has taught us. Nor is mere education and increased awareness adequate to eliminate negative attitudes. The very structures of society, especially the ways in which men are socialized and taught gender roles, must be changed to eliminate bi-negativity.

Predictors of homo-negativity vary widely, depending on the sampling and statistical methods used, but several consistent findings appear in research on the subject (Eliason, 1995). Factors such as being male (D'Augelli & Rose, 1990), being an adolescent or young adult (Marsiglio, 1993), holding traditional gender role beliefs (Herek, 1988), regularly attending a Christian church (Seltzer, 1992), and having little or no contact with lesbians and gay men (Herek & Glunt, 1993) often predict the degree of homo-negativity. The results of my study suggest that many of the same variables may help to explain bi-negativity, supporting the link between masculine gender socialization and negative attitudes about sexual minorities.

Since my study was published, there has been another quantitative study of attitudes about bisexuality. Jonathan Mohr and Aaron Rochlen (1999) gave an 18-item scale about bisexuality to nearly 600 heterosexual college students and found, as in my study, that heterosexual men rated bisexual men much more negatively than they rated bisexual women. They also found that race, religious attendance, and political ideology were associated with attitudes about bisexuality. Specifically, African Americans (especially men), those who attended church more often, and those with conservative political views had more negative attitudes about bisexuality. On the other hand, Leah Spalding and Letitia Anne Peplau (1997) asked heterosexual students to rate stories about dating couples on a variety of dimensions and found no differences in attitudes toward bisexual men and bisexual women–both were seen as less likely to be monogamous, more likely to give a sexually transmitted disease to a partner, and less able to satisfy a partner sexually than gays or lesbians (but more able to satisfy a partner sexually than heterosexuals).

The fact that the same variables are related to bi-negativity to nearly the same degree as to homo-negativity shows that the two stem from the same root oppression of heterosexism. However, there are some differences in the underlying stereotypes that drive bi-negativity and homo-negativity. Bisexuals are considered to have more flexible attitudes about sex, and they are not thought to be "born that way," as many respondents claim about lesbians and gay men. Some of the stereotypical statements used in this study were derived from the experiences of bisexual women in lesbian communities or in

gay/lesbian political organizations and are particular to those settings. Heterosexual people may not make such clear distinctions between lesbians, gay men, bisexual men, and bisexual women as gays and lesbians do. As the writing of many bisexual women indicates, they typically face more significant prejudice from lesbians than from heterosexuals (see, for example, The Bisexual Anthology Collective, 1995; Hutchins & Kaahumanu, 1991; Weise, 1992). This prejudice may not be greater in degree, but it has greater personal consequences for bisexual women who attempt to have sexual and social relationships within lesbian communities. Bisexual men may find greater acceptance in lesbian and gay social and political organizations, which are not driven by the separatism of some lesbian feminist groups, where ''male energy'' and ''heterosexual privilege'' are frequently issues.

This study has a number of significant limitations that are evident from the results. First, I assumed that students would be familiar with and have a similar definition of bisexuality. However, the widespread lack of knowledge about bisexuality that was demonstrated by the high number of ''don't know'' responses seems to suggest otherwise. This fact should not be surprising, though, because even people who self-identify as bisexual do not agree on a common definition. It is also not clear if respondents were considering sexual behavior, sexual fantasy, or only self-identification when they read the stereotypical statements related to bisexuality (for a discussion of the different meanings of bisexual, see Fox, 1996). Secondly, I gave the students a list of preconceived stereotypes based on a reading of the literature and my experiences in lesbian, gay, and bisexual communities. I did not ask them to generate their own stereotypes, and as a result, I may be overlooking other important stereotypes that might be prevalent among heterosexual students. Finally, as I noted earlier, college undergraduates may not be typical of the general population, and therefore the findings of the study cannot be generalized beyond this particular group, which was predominantly white and midwestern.

In conclusion, the heterosexual students in this sample showed a relatively high degree of bi-negativity, especially directed at bisexual men. These negative attitudes may stem from many factors, such as a lack of accurate information about sexuality and sexual identities, especially bisexuality; the sexual taboos that permeate U.S. society; a misguided fear of AIDS; and a process of masculine gender role socialization that does not permit sexual (or even emotional) expression between men. Gender role socialization is difficult to change, and will involve a long process; nevertheless, the lack of knowledge demonstrates the necessity of providing accurate information about bisexuality (and all other forms of sexuality), whether in an educational setting or simply in our daily encounters.

NOTE

1. Another factor here is that heterosexual men often do not take female-female eroticism seriously, believing that two women cannot have ''real'' sex without a penis present. For example, pornography marketed to heterosexual men regularly depicts two or more women in sexual activities as a prelude to heterosexual sex or for male erotic pleasure, whereas male-male eroticism is almost never shown.

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