

Sexual Stigma and Sexual Prejudice in the United States: A Conceptual Framework

Gregory M. Herek

In 1972, psychologist George Weinberg's book, *Society and the Healthy Homosexual*, introduced readers to a new term, *homophobia*, and to the then-novel idea that hostility to homosexuality, rather than homosexuality itself, posed a threat to mental health (Weinberg, 1972; see also Herek, 2004). The following year, the American Psychiatric Association's Board of Directors declared that homosexuality is not inherently associated with mental illness and voted to remove it from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, or DSM (Bayer, 1987; Minton, 2002). The American Psychological Association quickly endorsed the psychiatrists' action and further urged mental health professionals "to take the lead in removing the stigma of mental illness that has long been associated with homosexual orientations" (Conger, 1975, p. 633). Thus, a major cultural institution renounced its longstanding role in legitimating society's stigmatization of homosexuality just when the psychological manifestations of such stigma were beginning to be redefined as a social problem. This historic confluence of events provides an appropriate starting point for the present chapter.

The term homophobia has gained widespread usage since 1972, even as its limitations have become increasingly apparent. Chief among these is its construction of prejudice as an individual pathology. As I have explained elsewhere (Herek, 2004), this clinically derived perspective limits our ability to understand hostility toward sexual minorities, both among individuals and in society at large. I have argued instead for the value of framing heterosexuals' negative responses to sexual minorities in terms of *sexual prejudice* and of conceptualizing sexual prejudice as the internalization of societal stigma (Herek, 2000a, 2004, 2007; Herek, Chopp, & Strohl, 2007).

In the present chapter, I elaborate on these points and provide a more detailed framework than I have previously presented for conceptualizing both societal and individual reactions to homosexuality and sexual minorities in the United States.¹ A central aim of this discussion is to integrate insights relevant to sexual orientation from the sociological literature on *stigma* with findings from psychological research

¹The framework described here may have applicability across national and cultural boundaries, as suggested by the fact that some of its key underlying constructs have been developed outside the United States (e.g., Scambler & Hopkins, 1986). Because most of the data I discuss (including my own empirical research) are derived from US samples, however, I restrict my generalizations to American culture.

on *prejudice*. Although the terms stigma and prejudice have often been used interchangeably, distinguishing between the two constructs permits a more refined understanding of the status and experiences of sexual minorities than is possible from either a sociological or psychological research perspective alone. In addition to incorporating institutional and individual levels of analysis, the framework described here suggests a rethinking of some existing constructs (e.g., internalized stigma, felt stigma) in ways that are amenable to describing the experiences of both the nonstigmatized majority and the stigmatized minority group. It also considers points of intersection between structural and individual stigma.

I begin by briefly introducing the construct of stigma and discussing its structural manifestations in the institutions of society. Then, consistent with the theme of the present volume, I focus mainly on manifestations of stigma among individuals. After discussing three such manifestations, I consider how individuals' attitudes can affect structural stigma and how cultural events can create conditions that are conducive to the diminution of individual prejudice.

A Framework for Conceptualizing Sexual Stigma

Like most contemporary discussions in this area, the present chapter draws from Goffman's (1963) seminal account for a basic definition of stigma. While acknowledging that the term historically referred to a mark or bodily sign "designed to expose something unusual and bad about the moral status of the signifier" (Goffman, 1963, p. 1), he focused attention on the socially constructed meaning of the mark. By virtue of the mark (or characteristic or group membership), an individual is regarded by society as diverging in a disfavored way from its understanding of normalcy. Thus, he used stigma to refer to "an undesired differentness" (p. 5) and "an attribute that is deeply discrediting" (p. 3). A particular attribute can be discrediting in one context but desired or expected in another, although Goffman noted that "there are important attributes that almost everywhere in our society are discrediting" (p. 4). Other writers have similarly emphasized that stigma is very much about the socially constructed meanings associated with a characteristic and have noted that these meanings can vary across situations (e.g., Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998; Jones et al., 1984). Moreover, the meanings are grounded in society's power relations (Link & Phelan, 2001). Compared to the nonstigmatized, individuals who inhabit a stigmatized role enjoy less access to valued resources, less influence over others, and less control over their own fate.

With these insights as a foundation, stigma is used here to refer to the negative regard and inferior status that society collectively accords to people who possess a particular characteristic or belong to a particular group or category. Inherent in this definition is the fact that stigma constitutes shared knowledge about which attributes and categories are valued by society, which ones are denigrated, and how these valuations vary across situations.

Sexual stigma is a particular instance of this phenomenon. It is the stigma attached to any nonheterosexual behavior, identity, relationship, or community. In other words, it is socially shared knowledge about homosexuality's devalued status relative to heterosexuality. Like other stigmas, it creates social roles and expectations for conduct that are understood and shared by the members of society, regardless of their own sexual orientation or personal attitudes. Most people in the United States know that homosexual desires and conduct are regarded negatively relative to heterosexuality, and they are aware of the malevolent stereotypes that are routinely attached to individuals whose personal identities are based on same-sex attractions, behaviors, relationships, or membership in a sexual minority community.

Stigma-based differentials in status and power are legitimated and perpetuated by society's institutions and ideological systems in the form of structural or institutional stigma (e.g., Link & Phelan, 2001). Structural stigma "is formed by sociopolitical forces and represents the policies of private and governmental institutions that restrict the opportunities of stigmatized groups" (Corrigan et al., 2005, p. 557). An example is institutional racism (Carmichael & Hamilton, 1967), that is, "accumulated institutional practices that work to the disadvantage of racial minority groups even in the absence of individual prejudice or discrimination" (Link & Phelan, 2001, p. 372).

Similarly, the power differential at the heart of sexual stigma is perpetuated by structural sexual stigma, which is referred to here as *heterosexism*. By embedding sexual stigma in society's institutions – including religion, the law, and medicine – heterosexism ensures that sexual minority individuals have less power than heterosexuals. It accomplishes this through at least two general processes. First, it promotes a heterosexual assumption (i.e., all people are presumed to be heterosexual) which renders gay, lesbian, and bisexual people invisible in most social situations. Second, when sexual differences become visible, heterosexism perpetuates the assumption that heterosexuals, heterosexual behavior, and different-sex relationships are normal and natural, whereas nonheterosexuals, homosexual behavior, and same-sex relationships are abnormal and unnatural and, therefore, inferior. Heterosexuals are regarded as prototypical members of the category *people*, whereas homosexuals and bisexuals are considered deviants and thus require explanation (Hegarty & Pratto, 2004). This deviant status serves to legitimate hostility, discrimination, and even aggression against sexual minorities (for a more detailed discussion of heterosexism in religion, law, and medicine, see Herek et al., 2007).

Heterosexism serves as the foundation and backdrop for individual manifestations of sexual stigma. The present chapter focuses principally on three such manifestations (a) individual behaviors that express stigma, (b) individuals' awareness of stigma and its consequences, and (c) individuals' acceptance of stigma's legitimacy, whether it is aimed at them or at others. These manifestations – labeled *enacted stigma*, *felt stigma*, and *internalized stigma*, respectively – are each discussed now.

Enacted Stigma

In his classic work on prejudice, Allport (1954) described a continuum of negative actions through which prejudice might be expressed, ranging from antilocution through avoidance, discrimination, and physical attack, and culminating in extermination of the outgroup. Consistent with Allport's conceptualization, sexual stigma is overtly expressed through actions ranging from antigay comments and the use of antigay epithets, to shunning and ostracism of sexual minority individuals, to overt discrimination and violence. In some societies during certain historical eras, such as twentieth century Nazi Germany, state-sponsored persecution and violence has resulted in the imprisonment and death of many sexual minority individuals (Micheler, 2002).

Although most enactments of stigma target sexual minority individuals, some are directed at the friends and family members of sexual minorities, and at "allies," that is, heterosexuals who take a public stand against sexual stigma. Such individuals experience stigma by association – what Goffman (1963) called a *courtesy stigma* – because of their connections with sexual minorities (Neuberg, Smith, Hoffman, & Russell, 1994; Sigelman, Howell, Cornell, Cutright, & Dewey, 1991). Moreover, because of sexual orientation's concealability, any heterosexual can be mistakenly labeled homosexual or bisexual. Thus, everyone is potentially vulnerable to enactments of sexual stigma.

Violence is arguably the most extreme form taken by such enactments. Reflecting the hegemony of sexual stigma in the United States, violent victimization was long considered the inevitable price that homosexual people paid when they became visible to heterosexuals. Perpetrators were rarely arrested or prosecuted. Indeed, victims were routinely blamed for having invited their attacks (Herek & Berrill, 1992). In the 1980s, however, the gay community allied itself with the civil rights, feminist, and crime victim movements to challenge the legitimacy of this worldview. Community advocates had considerable success in arguing that antigay attacks – like other instances of murder, assault, robbery, and vandalism – should rightly be regarded as crimes and that blame and punishment should be directed at the perpetrators, not the victims (Herek & Sims, 2008).

In response, policymakers began to redefine antigay violence in the 1980s, recognizing it as a social problem (Jenness & Grattet, 2001). Antigay attacks came to be included under the general rubric of *hate crimes*, which are commonly defined as criminal actions intended to inflict physical injury, property damage, or emotional suffering because of the victim's perceived race, sexual orientation, religion, or other comparable group membership (Herek, 1989; Levin & McDevitt, 1993). One important outcome of this effort was the enactment of the 1990 Hate Crimes Statistics Act (Public Law 101–275, 104 Stat. 140), which directed the federal government to collect statistics on hate crimes based on race, ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation.

Between 1991 and 2004, the FBI recorded more than 14,800 incidents based on sexual orientation, representing approximately 17,000 victims. In any given year, sexual orientation incidents have comprised about 11–17% of all bias

crimes reported to the FBI (Herek & Sims, 2008). However, these figures understate the true incidence of antigay crimes because reporting by law enforcement agencies is voluntary and the quality of data varies widely from one jurisdiction to another. In addition, many victims never report their experiences to the police because they fear further harassment or believe that their assailants will never be apprehended (Herek, Cogan, & Gillis, 2002). Data from the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) indicate that only about 42% of hate crime incidents motivated by the victim's perceived sexual orientation were reported to police authorities from July 2000 to December 2003 (Herek & Sims, 2008; Harlow, 2005). Using NCVS data, the Bureau of Justice Statistics estimated that more than 37,800 hate crime victimizations motivated by the victim's sexual orientation occurred in the United States during that period – considerably more than the FBI has recorded since the Hate Crimes Statistics Act was first enacted. These incidents constituted roughly 18% of all hate crime victimizations recorded by the NCVS (Harlow, 2005).

Estimates of the prevalence of hate crime experiences in the sexual minority population have typically utilized data from samples recruited through community groups and venues (Berrill, 1992; D'Augelli & Grossman, 2001; D'Augelli, Grossman, & Starks, 2006; Herek, Gillis, & Cogan, 1999; Huebner, Rebchook, & Kegeles, 2004; Pilkington & D'Augelli, 1995). These studies have demonstrated that victimization is widespread but, because they used convenience samples, the extent to which their results are generalizable cannot be determined. Population prevalence can be estimated, however, from a recent study reporting data from a national probability sample of self-identified lesbian, gay, and bisexual adults (Herek, in press). In that sample ($N=662$), 13% of the respondents had experienced violence against their person based on their sexual orientation at least once during their adult life, and 15% had experienced a property crime. Approximately 1 in 5 reported experiencing one or both types of crime. Gay men were significantly more likely than other respondents to report having been the victim of antigay violence (25%) and property crimes (28%). In all, about 38% of gay men reported experiencing one or both types of crimes, compared to 13% of lesbians, 11% of bisexual men, and 13% of bisexual women (Herek, in press).

Hate crime victimization exacts a serious toll. In addition to physical harm, hate crimes appear to inflict greater psychological trauma on victims than other kinds of violent crime. In one study, gay men and lesbians who had experienced a crime against their person based on their sexual orientation manifested significantly higher levels of anxiety, anger, depressive symptoms, and traumatic stress symptoms compared to lesbians and gay men who had experienced comparable crimes during the same time period that were unrelated to their sexual orientation (Herek et al., 1999). Other studies have similarly found that sexual minority victims of hate crimes have elevated levels of psychological distress (Mills et al., 2004; Szymanski, 2005).

In addition to violence, members of sexual minority groups routinely encounter other forms of enacted stigma because of their sexual orientation. In the previously cited national survey, for example, 13% of respondents reported having objects thrown at them because of their sexual orientation, 23% had been threatened with

violence, and 49% had experienced verbal abuse (Herek, in press). As with criminal assault and property crimes, gay men were the group most likely to report such attacks: 21% had objects thrown at them, 35% had been threatened, and 63% had experienced verbal abuse. In addition, 11% of respondents had experienced housing or employment discrimination because of their sexual orientation. Such discrimination was significantly more likely to be experienced by gay men and lesbians (reported by 18% and 16%, respectively) compared to bisexual men and women (reported by 4% and 7%, respectively).

Felt Stigma

As used here, felt stigma refers to an individual's expectancies about the probability that stigma will be enacted in different situations and under various circumstances. Felt stigma is based on an awareness of the existence of sexual stigma and beliefs about how and when society condones its enactment. Because individuals are motivated to avoid being the target of stigma enactments, this awareness often affects behavior. The pervasiveness of sexual stigma in the United States, coupled with the fact that everyone is a potential target, means that virtually all Americans experience some degree of felt sexual stigma, regardless of their own sexual orientation.

Scambler and Hopkins (1986) proposed that the emotion of fear underlies felt stigma. Whereas fear may indeed be a common response to the anticipation of enacted stigma, such an expectation might more usefully be considered a potential stressor that can elicit various emotional responses in different individuals and situations. Conceptualized as a potential stressor, felt stigma can be understood in terms of psychological theories of stress and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Meyer, 2003; Miller & Major, 2000). From this perspective, felt stigma is seen as stimulating an individual to make ongoing appraisals of the possibilities for stigma enactments in social situations. This process includes appraising both the threat posed by the situation and the options and resources available for avoiding harm. If a situation is evaluated as stressful – that is, if the threat exceeds the individual's available resources for responding to it – the individual engages in some form of coping behavior.

Past accounts of felt stigma have generally focused on how it motivates stigmatized individuals to engage in preemptive, protective coping to avoid situations in which stigma enactments are possible (Scambler, 1989; Scambler & Hopkins, 1986). Such behaviors include, for example, attempting to pass as a member of the nonstigmatized majority and isolating oneself from that majority. To the extent that individuals accurately assess the likelihood of stigma enactments in their social environment, such coping strategies can reduce their risks for discrimination and attack. In this sense, felt stigma can lead to highly adaptive behavior. However, trying to avoid stigma can also significantly disrupt one's life, restrict one's options, and heighten one's psychological distress (Herek, 1996; Lewis, Derlega, Griffin, & Krowinski, 2003).

Moreover, whereas instances of enacted stigma might occur relatively infrequently, felt stigma may be experienced by the stigmatized on a continuing basis. Thus, it can play a more pervasive role in shaping their daily lives.²

One way to operationally define felt stigma is to ask sexual minority group members about their expectations that nonheterosexual individuals will encounter discrimination or differential treatment in various situations. When questions of this type were posed in the previously cited national survey of lesbian, gay, and bisexual adults (Herek, in press), most respondents manifested some degree of felt stigma. More than one-third agreed with the statement, “Most people where I live think less of a person who is [gay/lesbian/bisexual].”³ About one-fourth *disagreed* that “Most employers where I live will hire openly [gay/lesbian/bisexual] people if they are qualified for the job.” Roughly 40% agreed that “Most people where I live would *not* want someone who is openly [gay/lesbian/bisexual] to take care of their children.” Overall, 55% of respondents gave at least one response symptomatic of felt stigma.

Felt stigma can also be observed in the phenomenon of stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995). As with other stigmatized groups, when sexual minority individuals find themselves in situations that make stereotypes about their group salient, their performance can be impaired. For example, the stereotype that gay men (and, to a lesser extent, lesbians) prey on children has been widespread in the United States at least since the World War II era (Chauncey, 1993; Freedman, 1989). Although most heterosexual Americans today do not believe that gay men and women are child molesters (Herek, 2002a), the stereotype continues to be invoked in antigay discourse (e.g., Family Research Institute, 2006, “Molestation and Incest” section). It also can still play a role in felt stigma, as illustrated by a study comparing childcare skills among gay and heterosexual men (Bosson, Haymovitz, & Pinel, 2004). In that experiment, independent raters judged the gay men as displaying somewhat better childcare skills overall than the heterosexual men. However, the subgroup of gay men whose sexual orientation had been made salient to them prior to the task performed more poorly than did other gay men, and this difference was due mainly to the former group’s higher levels of nonverbal anxiety during the interaction. The researchers concluded that making the gay men’s sexual orientation salient increased stereotype threat for them, and subsequently had negative effects on their performance in the child care task (Bosson et al., 2004).

²Felt stigma can be distinguished from stigma consciousness, which refers to the extent to which stigmatized individuals are chronically self-conscious of their own stigmatized status and expect to be stereotyped by others because of it (Pinel, 1999). Stigma consciousness can be understood as a manifestation of felt stigma, but the latter construct more broadly encompasses awareness of the general effects of stigma — enacted not only against oneself but also against others who manifest the stigmatized characteristic. In addition, felt stigma is experienced by nonstigmatized individuals as well as the stigmatized.

³The item wording matched the respondent’s preferred self-label.

In response to felt stigma, many sexual minority individuals carefully manage information about themselves in order to prevent potential attackers from knowing about their sexual orientation (Herek, 1996). This coping strategy can lead them to chronically conceal their sexuality, a policy with significant costs. Keeping one's sexual orientation a secret involves constant effort and vigilance. It requires the individual to lead a kind of double life and often interferes with normal social interaction, thereby reducing her or his opportunities for social support (Herek, 1996). Passing as heterosexual also utilizes cognitive resources, which may make the secret chronically salient and have a negative impact on well-being (Pachankis, 2007; Smart & Wegner, 2000; see also Lewis, Derlega, Clarke, & Kuang, 2006). These factors help to explain why concealment of one's gay identity has been linked to psychological distress and health problems whereas being out of the closet has been found to correlate with positive psychological and physical states (Cole, 2006; Morris, Waldo, & Rothblum, 2001; Strachan, Bennett, Russo, & Roy-Byrne, 2007; Ullrich, Lutgendorf, & Stapleton, 2003; but see Frable, Wortman, & Joseph, 1997). Thus, although concealing one's sexual orientation can protect an individual from experiencing enacted stigma, it also creates stress and may have deleterious effects on psychological and physical well-being.

For heterosexuals, sexual stigma tends not to be salient unless sexual orientation becomes personally relevant, as when they knowingly encounter a gay, lesbian, or bisexual person, or in situations where their own sexual orientation might be questioned. On those occasions, felt stigma can motivate them to ensure that their non-stigmatized status is readily evident to others, thereby avoiding the possibility that they will be inaccurately perceived as stigmatized (and hence become a target of enacted stigma).

Like sexual minority individuals, heterosexuals acquire the knowledge and expectations that constitute felt stigma during childhood and adolescence as they learn peer group attitudes toward homosexuality (Phoenix, Frosh, & Pattman, 2003; Poteat, Espelage, & Green, 2007). During this time, the negative consequences of being labeled a homosexual are often forcefully demonstrated to them (Poteat & Espelage, 2007; Smith, 1998). Self-presentation strategies become especially important for males, who are continually called upon to affirm their heterosexual masculinity (Herek, 1986). The pervasive threat of physical, social, and psychological punishment for transgressing sex and gender boundaries pressures men to monitor their own actions for tell-tale signs of effeminacy (Plummer, 2006), and can lead them to enact sexual stigma against others to prove to their peers that they are "real men" (Kimmel, 1997).

It can also have more subtle influences on behavior. For example, whereas American children frequently touch others of their same sex, adults are much more likely to touch different-sex adults than same-sex adults during public interactions (Major, Schmidlin, & Williams, 1990). Indeed, heterosexual men, especially those with strongly hostile attitudes toward homosexuality, tend not to touch their male friends in a manner more intimate than a handshake (Roese, Olson, Borenstein, Martin, & Shores, 1992), perhaps because such touching might cause one to be

perceived as homosexual (Derlega, Lewis, Harrison, Winstead, & Costanza, 1989). Heterosexuals, especially men, may also be deterred from engaging in behaviors that could cause them to be labeled homosexual or gay, even when those behaviors might be psychologically beneficial (Bosson, Prewitt-Freilino, & Taylor, 2005; Bosson, Taylor, & Prewitt-Freilino, 2006).

Internalized Stigma

Internalization is the process whereby individuals adopt a social value, belief, regulation, or prescription for conduct as their own and experience it as a part of themselves (e.g., Kelman, 1961; Ryan & Connell, 1989). Thus, internalized stigma refers to an individual's personal acceptance of stigma as a part of her or his own value system and self-concept. When someone internalizes stigma, she or he embraces society's denigration and discrediting of the stigmatized group. Internalized stigma contrasts to felt stigma, which is all about one's awareness of social norms and expectations that stigma will be enacted but which does not necessarily reflect an individual's own attitudes.

The construct of internalized stigma has sometimes been subsumed under the definition of felt stigma. Writing about people with epilepsy, for example, Scambler and Hopkins (1986) proposed that "felt stigma refers principally to the fear of enacted stigma, but also encompasses a feeling of shame associated with being epileptic" (Scambler & Hopkins, 1986, p. 33). Such a "feeling of shame" is a manifestation of what is here labeled internalized stigma. Differentiating internalized from felt stigma is warranted for at least two reasons. First, the constructs are logically separable: An individual can recognize the imminent threat of an enactment of stigma in a particular situation without believing it is justified. Second, as explained later, internalized stigma can be usefully conceptualized as a phenomenon that is experienced by the nonstigmatized as well as the stigmatized. The social and psychological processes associated with the internalization of stigma differ between these two groups.

Self-Stigma

When a stigmatized individual's self-concept is congruent with the stigmatizing responses of society, the result is *self-stigma* (Corrigan & Watson, 2002; Jones et al., 1984). For sexual minorities, self-stigma involves accepting society's negative evaluation of homosexuality and consequently harboring negative attitudes toward oneself and one's own homosexual desires. Such attitudes may be manifested as a wish to renounce one's homosexuality and become heterosexual (e.g., Herek, Cogan, Gillis, & Glunt, 1998). Weinberg (1972) originally defined homophobia as encompassing self-stigma, which he labeled "internalized homophobia" (p. 83; see also Shidlo, 1994). According to Weinberg, "the person who from early life has loathed himself for homosexual urges arrives at this attitude by a process exactly like the one occurring in heterosexuals who

hold the prejudice against homosexuals” (Weinberg, 1972, p. 74). This process, he explained, involves forming impressions about homosexuality in a cultural context that is “almost wholly derogatory” (p. 74).

Psychologists have often assumed that some degree of self-stigma is inevitable in members of socially marked groups. Writing about racial, ethnic, and religious minorities, for example, Allport (1954) observed that “since no one can be indifferent to the abuse and expectations of others we must anticipate that ego defensiveness will frequently be found among members of groups that are set off for ridicule, disparagement, and discrimination. It could not be otherwise” (Allport, p. 143; see also Major & Vick, 2005). Similarly, self-stigma has often been assumed to be virtually universal among sexual minorities, owing to the pervasiveness of sexual stigma. Writing about gay men, for example, Malyon (1981–1982) commented, “Since homophobic beliefs are a ubiquitous aspect of contemporary social mores and cultural attitudes, the socialization of the incipient homosexual individual nearly always involves an internalization of the mythology and opprobrium which characterize current social attitudes toward homosexuality” (Malyon, 1981–1982 p. 60, citation omitted).

Empirical research, however, indicates there is variability in the extent to which sexual minority individuals experience self-stigma related to their sexual orientation (e.g., Herek et al., 1998; Szymanski, Chung, & Balsam, 2001). Moreover, research on self-stigma among other minority groups suggests that it varies both among individuals and across situations (e.g., Crocker, 1999; Crocker & Major, 1989). Nevertheless, to the extent that it occurs in sexual minority individuals, sexual self-stigma – which has also been labeled *internalized heterosexism* (Szymanski & Chung, 2003a, b) and *internalized homonegativity* (Mayfield, 2001; Tozer & Hayes, 2004) – is generally considered maladaptive. It often has important negative consequences for one’s physical and psychological well-being (Herek & Garnets, 2007; Meyer, 2003; Williamson, 2000).

Sexual Prejudice

As noted earlier, distinguishing between felt and internalized stigma permits consideration of the internalization of stigma by members of the nonstigmatized majority. Just as the internalization of societal stigma is manifested among the stigmatized as negative attitudes toward the self, so it is manifested among members of the nonstigmatized majority in the form of negative attitudes toward the stigmatized, that is, prejudice. Thus, *sexual prejudice* is internalized sexual stigma that results in the negative evaluation of sexual minorities.⁴

⁴Although sexual prejudice is typically manifested by heterosexuals, it is also possible for sexual minority individuals to hold negative attitudes toward other gay, lesbian, and bisexual people. As with prejudiced heterosexuals, these attitudes result from the internalization of sexual stigma. Such attitudes are often closely associated with self-stigma. In addition, some sexual minority individuals harbor negative attitudes toward heterosexuals. These attitudes can be appropriately labeled sexual prejudice but, because heterosexuality is not a stigmatized category in society, such prejudice does not reflect the internalization of societal stigma (for further discussion of this point, see Herek, 2007).

Sexual prejudice is conceptualized here as an *attitude*, that is, a category-based evaluative tendency to respond to individuals or groups according to their perceived sexual orientation (Albarracín, Zanna, Johnson, & Kumkale, 2005; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). In contemporary social psychological theory, attitudes are understood as psychological entities based on information derived from behaviors, beliefs, and affect. Attitudes can both influence and be inferred from those three sources, but nevertheless are distinguishable from them (e.g., Albarracín et al.; Fabrigar, MacDonald, & Wegener, 2005; Haddock, Zanna, & Esses, 1993).

In practice, such distinctions can be difficult to make because expressions of particular beliefs, affects, and behaviors can themselves serve as symbolic expressions of attitudes. For example, negative *behaviors* toward sexual minority individuals (i.e., stigma enactments) are often motivated by prejudice (e.g., Bernat, Calhoun, Adams, & Zeichner, 2001; Parrott & Zeichner, 2005; San Miguel & Millham, 1976), but this is not always the case. Some heterosexuals who perpetrate antigay hate crimes nevertheless express favorable attitudes toward gay people as a group (Franklin, 1998), and most heterosexuals who hold negative attitudes toward sexual minorities never commit acts of antigay violence. As in other domains (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2005), patterns of antigay behavior are likely to be correlated with sexual prejudice, but only moderately so (Franklin, 2000; Patel, Long, McCammon, & Wuensch, 1995; Roderick, McCammon, Long, & Allred, 1998).⁵

Similarly, beliefs about sexual minorities are correlated with sexual prejudice but are distinct from it. Discussions of beliefs as the cognitive sources of attitudes usually focus on stereotypes. Broadly speaking, stereotypes result from normal processes of cognitive categorization and can be relatively benign. Malevolent stereotypes, however, such as the previously mentioned stereotype of gay men as child molesters, figure prominently in sexual prejudice (Simon, 1998). Belief in such stereotypes fuels sexual prejudice in some individuals while providing others with a means for justifying their preexisting antipathy toward sexual minorities. Prejudice impairs heterosexuals' ability to suppress stereotypical thoughts about sexual minorities (Monteith, Spicer, & Tooman, 1998). It can bias their perceptions of sexual minority individuals and influence their assimilation of new information about the group, which can perpetuate their stereotypical beliefs (e.g., Munro & Ditto, 1997; Sherman, Stroessner, Conrey, & Azam, 2005). Even when heterosexuals perceive intragroup variability among sexual

⁵ Data from a heterosexual undergraduate student sample (described later and in the Appendix) illustrate this point. Respondents were asked to indicate how often they had engaged in each behavior on a list of 16 different acts. The list included 7 positive behaviors (e.g., "I started a conversation with a man whom I thought might be gay," "I confronted someone who was making negative comments or hostile jokes about lesbians") and 9 negative behaviors (e.g., "I damaged the property of a man I thought was gay," "I made unfriendly remarks or hostile jokes about lesbians"), which were summed separately to yield an index of Positive Behaviors Toward Gay Men (or Lesbians) and an index of Negative Behaviors Toward Gay Men (or Lesbians). Overall, moderate correlations were observed between the behavior scales and the Attitudes Toward Gay Men (ATG) and Attitudes Toward Lesbians (ATL) scales. For the ATG, $r(105) = -0.41$ with positive behaviors toward gay men and 0.41 for negative behaviors toward gay men. For the ATL, $r(120) = -.38$ for positive behaviors toward lesbians. The correlation between ATL scores and negative behaviors toward lesbians could not be interpreted because most respondents (57%) reported never having engaged in such behaviors.

minorities, they may assimilate it into stereotypical subgroups, e.g., groups that are cognitively organized in terms of their conformity to traditional gender roles, such as leathermen vs. drag queens (Clausell & Fiske, 2005). In addition to stereotypes, other beliefs about stigmatized groups also contribute to prejudice. For example, prejudiced heterosexuals may harbor the belief that sexual minorities endorse values that conflict with their own (Esses, Haddock, & Zanna, 1993; Haddock et al., 1993).

As with behaviors and beliefs, sexual prejudice is related to but distinct from negative affect toward sexual minorities (see generally Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005; Clore & Schnall, 2005; Mackie, Devos, & Smith, 2000). However, sexual prejudice and negative emotional reactions to sexual minorities are sometimes equated. Indeed, the presumption that sexual prejudice is rooted in the emotion of fear is inherent in the construct of homophobia (Weinberg, 1972) and some widely used measures of sexual prejudice are framed primarily in terms of affect (e.g., Ricketts & Hudson, 1998). Whereas attitudes have temporal stability and are focused on a specific object, however, emotions are ephemeral and need not be focused (Clore & Schnall, 2005). Moreover, heterosexuals' negative affect toward sexual minorities can have sources other than prejudice. For example, a heterosexual's discomfort about anticipated interactions with sexual minorities may reflect her or his anxiety about being in a novel social situation or fear of inadvertently behaving in a manner that is perceived as offensive (Hebl, Tickle, & Heatherton, 2000; Stephan & Stephan, 1985). Affective reactions to sexual minorities can form the basis for attitudes in some cases and may mediate the relationship between sexual prejudice and enactments of stigma (e.g., Parrott & Zeichner, 2005; Parrott, Zeichner, & Hoover, 2006) just as levels of sexual prejudice can moderate the affect that heterosexuals experience in response to interactions with sexual minorities (Blair, Park, & Bachelor, 2003).

Conceptualized as an attitude, sexual prejudice remains widespread in the United States. However, national survey data show that heterosexuals' attitudes toward homosexuality and toward lesbians and gay men have become less condemnatory and more accepting in recent years.⁶ These trends are especially evident in patterns of responses to three questions that have been posed repeatedly in ongoing national surveys: the General Social Survey (GSS) question about homosexual behavior, the Gallup Poll question about homosexuality as an acceptable lifestyle, and the American National Election Studies (ANES) feeling thermometer question about "gays and lesbians."⁷

⁶ My discussion in the present chapter focuses mainly on research that has employed explicit or direct measures of sexual prejudice. Some researchers have assessed heterosexuals' attitudes utilizing indirect measures, such as the Implicit Attitudes Test (e.g., Banse, Seise, & Zerbes, 2001; Dasgupta & Rivera, 2006; Gabriel, Banse, & Hug, 2007; Jellison et al., 2004; Rowatt et al., 2006; Steffens & Buchner, 2003). Although theoretical and methodological questions about such measures remain to be resolved (Arkes & Tetlock, 2004; Fazio & Olson, 2003), they hold promise for future research. A discussion of them, however, is beyond the scope of the present chapter.

⁷ My discussion of polling data relies on my own examination of the data in publicly available archives (especially the Roper Center at the University of Connecticut), as well as the published sources cited here.

Since the early 1970s, GSS respondents have been asked whether sexual relations between two adults of the same sex are “always wrong, almost always wrong, wrong only sometimes, or not wrong at all.” Between 1973 and 1993, they were considered “always wrong” by more than two-third of those surveyed. The proportion responding “never” or “only sometimes” wrong ranged around 20%. Beginning in 1993, however, the “always wrong” proportion began to decline, dropping to 54% in 1998 and remaining fairly stable since then (Loftus, 2001). Although a majority still regards homosexual behavior as wrong (57% in 2004), the trend clearly has been in the direction of less condemnation. This decline does not appear to be simply part of a general sexual permissiveness, as indicated by responses to two parallel GSS items that ask about premarital and extramarital sex. Condemnation of premarital sex has never been very strong and it remained fairly stable during the 1990s, ranging around 30%. And the proportion of respondents who considered extramarital relations always wrong remained high (close to 80%) even while condemnation of homosexual acts was declining. Thus, the decrease in moral condemnation for same-sex relations appears to reflect attitudes that are specific to homosexuality (Loftus, 2001).⁸

Gallup polls have assessed opinions about whether homosexuality should be considered an acceptable alternative lifestyle. Responses to this question between 1982 and 1992 indicated a roughly 3-to-2 ratio of “no” to “yes” responses. By a margin of 51–34%, respondents did not consider homosexuality an acceptable lifestyle in 1982. In 1992, the margin was 19 points (57–38%). During the late 1990s, however, the pattern began to reverse. In 1999, 50% considered homosexuality an acceptable lifestyle, compared to 46% who regarded it as unacceptable. By 2003, the acceptable-unacceptable gap had widened to 54–43%. Except for a brief reversal immediately after the US Supreme Court’s 2003 *Lawrence v. Texas* ruling (when 49% of those surveyed felt that homosexuality was unacceptable, compared to 46% who felt it was acceptable), this pattern has held steady. In 2007, 57% of respondents considered homosexuality an acceptable lifestyle (Saad, 2007).

A third indicator of attitude trends comes from the ongoing ANES, whose participants rate political figures and social groups on “feeling thermometer” scales ranging from 0 (very cold or unfavorable feelings) to 100 (very warm or favorable feelings). In 1984, when the ANES first included a feeling thermometer referring to “gays and lesbians,” the mean rating was 30. Thermometer scores have increased steadily since then, reaching an average of 39 in 1996, jumping to 48 in 2000 and remaining steady at 49 in 2004. Compared to the public’s feelings toward other groups, “gays and lesbians” generally rank near the bottom of the list (Sherrill & Yang, 2000). In the 2004 ANES, for example, only illegal immigrants scored lower than gays and lesbians. Respondents felt warmer toward big business, unions, the

⁸The phrasing of the GSS question, which frames homosexual relations as wrong, might bias responses. In other surveys, however, responses to differently worded items about the morality of homosexual behavior have yielded similar findings. In Gallup polls between 2001 and 2007, for example, 49–55% of respondents believed that homosexual behavior is morally wrong, whereas 38–47% believed it is not morally wrong (Saad, 2007).

women's movement, and welfare recipients than they did toward gays and lesbians. It is also noteworthy that the number of respondents assigning gays and lesbians a zero – the coldest possible score – tends to be larger than for other groups. Most groups listed in the ANES receive zero ratings from no more than 1–2% of respondents. By contrast, about one-third of the 1984 and 1988 respondents gave gays and lesbians a zero (Sherrill & Yang, 2000). Since then, the proportion has dropped but it was still about 15% in 2004.

The ANES thermometer question asks simultaneously about respondents' feelings toward both gay men and lesbians, and it does not assess feelings toward bisexual men and women. In a 1999 national telephone survey, I asked participants to provide separate thermometer ratings for these four groups (Herek, 2002a). Consistent with the ANES data, overall ratings for the groups were in the mid- to high 40s, with ratings for bisexual men the lowest at 44. The aggregate ratings, however, obscure a gender difference in responses to the four groups. Heterosexual women rated bisexuals significantly less favorably than they rated homosexuals, regardless of gender, whereas heterosexual men rated sexual minority males less favorably than sexual minority females, regardless of whether the target was bisexual or homosexual. Thus, heterosexual men tended to respond to sexual minorities in terms of their gender, whereas heterosexual women tended to respond in terms of their orientation group, i.e., homosexual vs. bisexual (Herek, 2000b, 2002a). This pattern was also observed in the 2005 telephone survey data reported later.

In the national surveys described here, as well as in laboratory experiments and questionnaire studies with convenience samples, sexual prejudice has consistently been correlated with various demographic, psychological, and social variables. In contrast to heterosexuals with favorable attitudes toward gay people, those with high levels of sexual prejudice are more likely to be male, older, less educated, and residing in geographic regions where negative attitudes represent the norm (e.g., rural areas, the Midwestern or Southern United States). They are more likely to be highly religious, as indicated by their frequent attendance at religious services and the importance they attach to religion as a guide in their daily lives. Their religious beliefs are likely to be conservative or fundamentalist (e.g., as indicated by their belief in scriptural literalism). They are more likely to be a Republican than a Democrat or an Independent, and to describe themselves as politically conservative rather than liberal or moderate. They tend to display higher levels of psychological authoritarianism, less sexual permissiveness, and more traditional gender role attitudes. They are more likely to believe that a homosexual orientation is freely chosen and less likely to have close personal friends or family members who are openly lesbian or gay (for reviews, see Herek, 1984b, 1994; Loftus, 2001; Simon, 1998; Whitley & Lee, 2000). The limited data that are available suggest that heterosexuals' attitudes toward bisexual men and women manifest similar patterns of correlations (Herek, 2002b; Mohr & Rochlen, 1999).

A growing body of research addresses the situational and dispositional factors underlying sexual prejudice. A thorough review of this work is beyond the scope of the present chapter (for a more extensive discussion, see Herek, 2008), but it

includes research examining the ways in which sexual prejudice is associated with religious and political values that are relevant to social identity (e.g., Batson, Floyd, Meyer, & Winner, 1999; Herek, 1987b; Jackson & Esses, 1997; Vescio & Biernat, 2003), adherence to gender roles and identity based on a heterosexual orientation (e.g., Jellison, McConnell, & Gabriel, 2004; Kilianski, 2003; Kite & Whitley, 1998), and perceived threats to self-esteem (e.g., Fein & Spencer, 1997; Meier, Robinson, Gaither, & Heinert, 2006).

One framework for understanding these sources of sexual prejudice is the functional theory of attitudes, which is based on the assumption that attitudes are formed and maintained because they serve one or more psychological needs for the individual (Katz, 1960; Maio & Olson, 2000; Smith, Bruner, & White, 1956). The function(s) served by an attitude can vary across situations and attitude objects, and among individuals. Thus, according to the functional approach, heterosexuals' attitudes toward lesbians and gay men are shaped by a combination of personal needs, situational factors, and perceptions of the cultural meanings attached to sexual minorities and to homosexuality. From a functional perspective, sexual prejudice provides a vehicle for some heterosexuals to affirm their self-concept as a religious and moral person, whereas it assists others by strengthening their bonds with valued groups, and still others in warding off threats to their self-esteem or in making sense of past experiences (e.g., Herek, 1987a, 2008).

Points of Connection: Intersections of Heterosexism and Sexual Prejudice

The foregoing conceptual framework is intended to facilitate the integration of sociocultural and individual perspectives in the study of phenomena related to sexual stigma. Using it as a foundation, in the remainder of the chapter I consider two points of intersection between sexual prejudice and cultural stigma. First, I explore how attitudes toward public policies related to sexual orientation can be understood as a domain in which sexual prejudice interacts with structural heterosexism. Then I consider how changes in sexual stigma and heterosexism during recent decades created conditions that have fostered reductions in sexual prejudice among key groups in society.

Public Policy Attitudes and Sexual Prejudice

Characterizing sexual prejudice as the internalization of sexual stigma might be misconstrued as implying that individuals are mere passive receptacles for cultural beliefs and norms concerning stigmatized conditions and groups. However, just as the stigmatized can accept or challenge their devalued status (Fine & Asch, 1988; Herek, 1996), so do the nonstigmatized play an active role in embracing or rejecting

society's prescriptions for prejudice. In the social construction of stigma, meanings are attached to traits, characteristics, and group memberships not only by received tradition but also through ongoing social interaction.

The outcome of this process is perhaps most evident in individual attitudes toward stigmatized group members. But it can also be observed in majority group members' attitudes toward whether and how stigma should be embedded in society's institutions. Acting in concert, individuals can choose to reinforce and expand structural stigma, to abolish it entirely, or to allow it to persist unchanged. In the realm of law and public policy, such collective influence is strong in societies like the United States, where citizens can effect institutional change through both their elected representatives and mechanisms of direct democracy such as ballot initiatives and referenda.

Historically, when the public has directly participated in the policy process in the United States, as when gay rights legislation has been put to a popular vote, the outcome has usually been detrimental to sexual minorities (Haider-Markel, Querze, & Lindaman, 2007). For example, voters in many municipalities overturned antidiscrimination ordinances in the 1970s and 1980s, and Colorado voters enacted Amendment 2 in 1992, which banned such laws statewide (Donovan, Wenzel, & Bowler, 2000; Herman, 1997). More recently, individual voters' opposition to marriage equality has played a central role in fostering new forms of legislative heterosexism through the passage of state ballot initiatives prohibiting marriage between same-sex couples – and, in some cases, any legal recognition of same-sex relationships (e.g., Herek, 2006; Peterson, 2005). Nevertheless, an examination of recent opinion trends across a range of policy domains reveals a mix of pro- and antigay patterns, suggesting that the democratic process might also be used to restrict the scope of heterosexism in the law.⁹

In the realm of free speech, for example, the public has generally expressed a desire to respect basic civil liberties for sexual minorities. This is apparent in response trends for three GSS questions concerning willingness to grant basic rights to “a man who admits that he is a homosexual.” Respondents are asked whether they would allow such a man to “make a speech in your community” or “teach in a college or university,” and whether they would endorse the removal of “a book he wrote in favor of homosexuality” from the public library.¹⁰ Even in 1973, responses to these items showed fairly strong support for First Amendment rights in connection with homosexuality. In that year, 61% would have allowed a homosexual man to speak, 47% would have allowed him to teach in a college, and 54% would have opposed censoring a book that he wrote in favor of homosexuality. By 2004, the proportions endorsing First Amendment rights regarding homosexuality had grown to 83% for speech, 79% for teaching, and 73% against library censorship.

Within the GSS, these three items are part of a series measuring general tolerance that also includes assessment of support for the free speech rights of groups

⁹Indeed, some antigay initiatives have been rejected by voters (e.g., Donovan et al., 2000).

¹⁰These questions are all framed in terms of granting civil liberties to a gay man. Because attitudes toward gay men often differ from attitudes toward lesbians (e.g., Herek, 2002a), it is conceivable that somewhat different patterns might emerge if the questions referred to a lesbian woman.

such as atheists, communists, and racists. When response patterns since the 1990s are compared, it is clear that tolerance has increased more rapidly for homosexuals than for the other target groups. By 2004, for example, when 83% would allow a homosexual man the right to give a speech, the proportions of respondents supporting a similar right for atheists, communists, and racists were 76%, 69%, and 62%, respectively. Analysis of trends indicates that the changes in attitudes toward civil liberties for a homosexual man are only partly explained by a general rise in public tolerance toward unpopular or stigmatized groups (Loftus, 2001).

By contrast, attitudes have fluctuated considerably in another domain of basic civil liberties – the right to private sexual conduct, as measured by responses to a Gallup poll item asking whether homosexual relations between consenting adults should or should not be legal (Saad, 2007). In 1977, respondents were evenly split, with 43% favoring legalization and 43% opposing it. By 1982, a plurality favored legalization (45–39%). During the mid-1980s, however, the trend sharply reversed. In 1986, for example, only 32% supported legalizing homosexual relations whereas 57% were opposed. During the 1990s, opinion fluctuated, with a plurality favoring legalization in 1992 (48–44%), but a similar plurality opposing it in 1996 (47–44%). In 1999, 50% favored legalization, compared to 43% who opposed it, and by the spring of 2003 the split had grown to 60% to 35%. In the immediate wake of the Supreme Court’s 2003 *Lawrence v. Texas* ruling, responses indicated increased opposition to legalizing same-sex relations. But by May 2004, legalization was again favored by a majority (52%). In 2007, 59% said consenting homosexual relations should be legal, roughly the same proportion as immediately prior to the 2003 *Lawrence* ruling. Thus, a majority support sexual privacy rights although responses to this question have been volatile, especially during the early years of the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s and immediately after Supreme Court rulings on the constitutionality of sodomy laws (i.e., *Bowers v. Hardwick*, 1986; *Lawrence et al. v. Texas*, 2003).

Moving from the domain of basic civil liberties and freedoms to that of equal rights, general support for equality in job opportunities has increased steadily and dramatically. In Gallup polls, for example, the proportion endorsing equal employment rights has grown from 56% in 1977 to 89% in 2007 (Saad, 2007). Support for employment equality has been somewhat less enthusiastic when questions are asked about specific occupations (e.g., clergy, military personnel, doctors) but the trend nevertheless has been toward steadily increasing support, and clear majorities now support equal rights in all of these sectors. One remarkable change has been in the proportion of Americans who feel homosexuals should be hired as elementary school teachers, which grew from 27% in 1977 to 54% in 2005 (Saad, 2005). Consistent with this trend, polls by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press show that the proportion of US adults who *disagreed* that school boards should be able to fire “teachers who are known homosexuals” rose from 42 to 62% between 1987 and 2003.

In contrast to its generally strong support for employment rights, the public has consistently opposed marriage equality for same-sex couples, although the

opinion divide has narrowed during the 2000s. A 2007 Gallup poll found that 53% of respondents believed “marriages between same-sex couples” should not be “recognized by the law as valid, with the same rights as traditional marriages,” whereas 46% believed such marriages should be valid. By comparison, marriage equality was opposed by a 62–35% majority in a 1999 Gallup poll (Saad, 2007). An August 2006 poll by the Pew Research Center found that 56% of respondents opposed “allowing gays and lesbians to marry legally,” compared to 35% who supported marriage rights (Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 2006).

Many individuals who oppose marriage equality are nevertheless supportive of civil unions and domestic partnerships, statuses that grant many of the same rights as marriage at the state government level. In most national surveys, when respondents who support full marriage equality are combined with those who support civil unions or their equivalent, the result is a majority of US adults supporting legal recognition of same-sex couples. In the 2004 November election exit polls, for example, 60% of voters supported some form of legal recognition for same-sex couples (Kohut, 2004). The August 2006 national survey of US adults by the Pew Center found that 54% favored allowing gay and lesbian couples to enter into legal agreements with each other that would give them many of the same rights as married couples (Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 2006).

In summary, although sexual minorities have not usually benefited when popular opinion has been directly translated into public policy through the ballot box, the American public does not uniformly endorse the expression of sexual stigma through the law. The public strongly endorses basic civil liberties for sexual minorities, such as freedom of speech, and the principle of equal opportunity in employment has overwhelming support, although that support varies somewhat depending on the specific occupation in question. Opinion about the right to sexual privacy has fluctuated, but most of the public now opposes the criminalization of private consensual homosexual behavior. And whereas a majority of the public opposes marriage equality, most adults nevertheless favor some form of legal recognition for same-sex couples, e.g., through institutions such as civil unions.

Previous empirical research has often treated policy attitudes as direct expressions of an individual’s level of sexual prejudice. Many attitude scales designed to measure sexual prejudice, for example, include questions about policies such as marriage laws, employment discrimination, or military personnel regulations. The high interitem correlations obtained in such scales confirm that policy attitudes and sexual prejudice are correlated. However, an argument can be made for distinguishing between attitudes toward sexual minorities as a group and attitudes toward policies affecting them.

For example, the GSS data show that much of the public condemns homosexual behavior as immoral while simultaneously endorsing civil liberties for homosexual men (see Loftus, 2001), suggesting that policy attitudes are independent of attitudes toward homosexuality to at least some extent. This distinction is inherent in the origins of the GSS questions about free speech rights. They were first conceptualized

as measures of *tolerance* which, by definition, can be extended to members of a disliked group. Indeed, the true test of tolerance is whether one is willing to protect the civil liberties of groups whose conduct or ideas one dislikes (McClosky & Brill, 1983; Stouffer, 1955).

Further support for a distinction between prejudice and policy attitudes can be found in empirical research showing that heterosexuals' attitudes toward gay men and lesbians do not fully account for the variation in their attitudes toward policies implicating sexual minorities. Analyses of national survey data assessing attitudes toward various policy attitudes, for example, have shown that factors such as humanitarian values, concern about "big government," political ideology, and religiosity are important predictors of public opinion, independent of respondents' affective reactions to gay men and lesbians (Strand, 1998; see also Wood & Bartkowski, 2004). Thus, distinguishing empirically between heterosexuals' attitudes toward sexual minorities and their policy attitudes concerning sexual orientation has potential value for yielding a greater understanding of sexual prejudice and, perhaps, of the ways it affects heterosexism.

To explore this idea, I collected data to assess the strength of the association between sexual prejudice and policy attitudes, and to examine whether this relationship might vary depending on how sexual prejudice is measured. Furthermore, I investigated whether other relevant variables might explain variations in policy attitudes, after controlling for sexual prejudice. I analyzed data from two different samples: (a) a convenience sample of UC Davis undergraduates ($N=244$) and (b) a national probability sample of English-speaking US citizens at least 18 years old who participated in a 2005 telephone survey ($N=2,214$). (Methodological details and scale items are reported in the Appendix.)

Respondents completed three measures of sexual prejudice, including my own Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men (ATLG) scale which consists of the Attitudes Toward Lesbians (ATL) and Attitudes Toward Gay Men (ATG) subscales (Herek, 1994, 1998). The ATLG presents respondents with evaluative statements about lesbians and gay men, to which they indicate their agreement or disagreement using a Likert-type response scale. The ATLG's reliability and validity in both self-administered and interviewer-administered formats have been well established in numerous questionnaire and survey studies whose participants ranged from convenience samples of college students to national probability samples of adults (Herek, 1988, 2002a; Herek & Capitanio, 1999b; Herek & Gonzalez-Rivera, 2006). Although the original subscales consisted of only ten different items each, still shorter 3-item parallel versions have proved to be adequate for most purposes. In addition to their brevity, the parallel versions have the advantage of permitting direct comparison of each respondent's attitudes toward gay men and toward lesbians. They were used in the present study.¹¹

¹¹ The items in the short form of the ATLG (as worded for the ATL subscale) are: (1) "Sex between two women is just plain wrong." (2) "I think female homosexuals (lesbians) are disgusting." (3) "Female homosexuality is a natural expression of sexuality in women."

The ATLG was developed on the basis of a series of factor analytic studies of responses to a large pool of attitude statements that included items from existing scales as well as newly constructed items (Herek, 1984a). Across multiple convenience samples, a single factor consistently accounted for a large portion of the variance in attitudes toward both lesbians and gay men for male and female respondents alike. This factor, labeled *Condemnation-Tolerance*, comprised statements characterizing homosexuality as unnatural, disgusting, perverse, sinful, a danger to society, and warranting negative social sanctions (Herek, 1984a). As suggested by the Condemnation-Tolerance label, the ATLG's operationalization of sexual prejudice fits squarely with the present chapter's definition of attitudes as an evaluative stance. Indeed, the items in the short versions of the ATL and ATG – which assess respondents' evaluation of homosexuality as wrong, unnatural, and disgusting – map onto key dimensions of a worldview hypothesized by Lakoff (2002) to underlie contemporary political attitudes in the United States.¹²

In addition to administering the ATLG, I collected information about the affective bases of respondents' attitudes using two different types of measures: feeling thermometers (with separate thermometers for lesbians and for gay men) and a measure of respondents' personal comfort or discomfort in social interactions with lesbians and with gay men. In the student sample, the latter construct was measured with a 10-item Social Discomfort Questionnaire (SDQ), with separate versions targeting situations involving lesbians (SDQ-L) and gay men (SDQ-G). In the national telephone survey, costs and time constraints prohibited administration of the full SDQs. Instead, single-item measures of discomfort about social contact with gay men or lesbians were administered to all respondents.

In the student sample, respondents were randomly assigned to complete either the gay male or lesbian version of all questionnaires. For each version, the sexual prejudice measures proved to be highly intercorrelated (for all coefficients, $p < 0.001$). For gay male targets ($n = 120$ respondents with complete data on all scales), the zero-order correlation between ATG scores and the gay male feeling thermometer was $r = -0.70$; between ATG scores and the SDQ-G, $r = 0.73$; between the gay male feeling thermometer and the SDQ-G, $r = -0.63$. For the measures targeting lesbians ($n = 123$ respondents with complete data for all scales), the correlations were $r = -0.64$ (ATL with thermometer), $r = 0.77$ (ATL with SDQ-L), and $r = -0.63$ (thermometer with SDQ-L).

¹² Although the ATLG scale predates Lakoff's analysis, the scale items coincide with key constructs in what Lakoff labeled "strict father morality," a moral system that invokes a mythic model of the family and underlies modern conservative politics (Lakoff, 2002, p. 65). According to his analysis, this system of moral thought is based on multiple metaphors, including moral order (which posits a dominance hierarchy of God over people, adults over children, and men over women), moral boundaries (which delineate permissible and impermissible ranges of behavior), and moral purity (which designates violations of morality as impure and thus tainted and corrupting). According to Lakoff, challenges to the moral order are understood as wrong, transgressions of moral boundaries are regarded as unnatural, and moral impurities are viewed as disgusting.

Table 1 Zero-order correlations among measures of reactions to lesbians and gay men (national sample)

	ATG	ATL	Gay male thermometer	Lesbian thermometer	Discomfort: Gay men
ATL	.80				
Gay Male Thermometer	-.59	-.54			
Lesbian Thermometer	-.54	-.58	.89		
Discomfort around gay men	.60	.53	-.57	-.51	
Discomfort around lesbians	.46	.55	-.43	-.49	.60

Note: $N \geq 1,835$ for all paired variables. For ATG and ATL scores, high scores = more prejudice. For thermometers, high scores = warmer, more favorable feelings. For discomfort variables, higher scores = greater discomfort. All coefficients are significant at $p < .001$

In the telephone sample, all respondents completed the sexual prejudice measures for both gay male and lesbian targets. As shown in Table 1, the correlations between different types of measures (e.g., ATG vs. thermometers) tended to be of lower magnitude than among the students, ranging from $r=0.43$ to $r=0.60$.

In addition to completing the sexual prejudice measures, respondents reported their attitudes toward different policies related to sexual orientation. The students completed three policy scales which assessed their support for or opposition to marriage equality for same-sex couples, allowing openly gay or lesbian personnel to serve in the military, and allowing sexual minorities to teach and care for children. For each student, the target of the policy attitude scales (lesbians or gay men) matched the target of the sexual prejudice measures they completed. Higher scores indicated greater opposition to sexual minority rights in each policy area. Respondents in the national sample were asked their opinions about passing a federal law to ensure that gay men and lesbians have equal rights in employment and allowing or forbidding marriage between two people of the same sex.

To examine the relationship between policy attitudes and sexual prejudice, I computed a series of ordinary least squares regression equations. For the student sample, Table 2 reports the unstandardized regression coefficients (which permit comparisons of each independent variable's contribution across policy issues and targets) and proportion of unique variance explained by each variable (which permits comparisons among variables within each policy issue and target), as well as the total variance explained by the sexual prejudice measures and by all variables included in the equations. To facilitate interpretation of the OLS regression results, the ATG and ATL scores, thermometer scores, and SDQ scores were all recoded to range from 0 to 1.

In combination, the sexual prejudice measures explained substantial portions of variation in each policy domain, ranging from 17.4% for military service by lesbians, to 65.7% for marriage equality for gay men. Examination of the unique variance associated with each aspect of sexual prejudice reveals that the measures were differentially related to the various policy attitudes in this sample. As shown in the first three rows of Table 2, ATG scores accounted for substantial portions of

Table 2 OLS regression analyses: sexual prejudice and value variables as predictors of policy attitudes (student sample)

Independent variable	Marriage equality (ME)		Military personnel policy (MPP)		Childcare and peaching policy (CTP)	
	Gay men	Lesbians	Gay men	Lesbians	Gay men	Lesbians
ATG/ATL	3.97 ^c (.096)	3.57 ^c (.048)	2.08 ^a (.036)	0.40 (.001)	1.68 ^b (.035)	1.04 (.007)
SDQ	1.87 ^b (.019)	1.74 (.009)	0.74 (.004)	2.34 (.021)	1.85 ^b (.038)	4.20 ^c (.091)
Thermometer	0.02 (.000)	-1.27 (.007)	-1.10 (.012)	-0.63 (.002)	-1.09 ^a (.017)	0.06 (.000)
Total R ² (all sexual prejudice variables)	.657 ^c		.301 ^c		.540 ^c	
Protestant Ethic	0.44 (.008)	0.43 (.006)	-0.20 (.002)	-0.63 (.017)	-0.25 (.005)	0.48 (.013)
Humanitarianism	-0.18 (.001)	-0.63 ^a (.016)	0.05 (.000)	-0.91 ^a (.040)	-0.71 ^b (.040)	-0.42 (.012)
Political Ideology (High = conservative)	0.29 ^b (.021)	0.32 ^a (.015)	0.05 (.001)	0.27 (.015)	-0.06 (.002)	0.13 (.004)
Religiosity (High = more religious)	0.40 ^c (.031)	0.22 (.008)	0.36 ^a (.034)	-0.21 (.010)	0.25 ^a (.024)	0.01 (.000)
Total R ² (all variables)	.746 ^c		.340 ^c		.599 ^c	

For each independent variable, the table reports the unstandardized regression coefficient and, in parentheses, the unique R² associated with that variable. Higher scores on the ME, MPP, and CTP scales reflect attitudes opposing pro-gay or pro-lesbian policies. Scores for the feeling thermometers, ATG/ATL, and SDQ measures were all transformed to a 0–1 scale. For feeling thermometers, high scores indicate warmer, more favorable feelings. For the ATG/ATL and SDQ measures, higher scores indicate more prejudice or greater discomfort.

^a*p* < .05; ^b*p* < .01; ^c*p* < .001.

unique variance in all three policy realms, whereas ATL scores were significant only in predicting marriage equality attitudes. Social discomfort played an important role in predicting attitudes toward gay male and lesbian teachers, whereas feeling thermometer scores accounted for at least 1% of unique variance for attitudes toward gay male military personnel and teachers.

Do factors other than sexual prejudice account for heterosexuals' policy attitudes? As shown in the remaining rows of Table 2, humanitarianism scores, self-rated political ideology, and religiosity (i.e., self-rated importance of religion as a guide in daily life) all contributed independently to policy attitudes, even when the effects of sexual prejudice were statistically controlled.

Similar patterns were observed in the national sample. Table 3 shows that, as in the student sample, the measures of sexual prejudice explained substantial proportions of the variance in policy attitudes: 14.3% for employment laws and 51.9% for marriage equality. Although they shared a considerable amount of variance, the sexual prejudice measures once again had differential predictive power. Attitudes toward marriage equality were predicted by both ATG and ATL scores, whereas employment nondiscrimination attitudes were predicted mainly by discomfort associated with gay men. Finally, as in the student sample, policy attitudes were not based solely on sexual prejudice. With reactions to sexual minorities statistically controlled, antigay policy attitudes were predicted significantly by nonegalitarianism, moral traditionalism, and political conservatism.

Table 3 OLS regression analyses: sexual prejudice and value variables as predictors of policy attitudes (national sample)

Independent variable	Employment nondiscrimination	Marriage equality
ATG	-0.19 (.001)	1.90 ^c (.022)
ATL	0.29 (.003)	1.75 ^c (.018)
Discomfort: Gay Men	0.44 ^c (.012)	0.30 (.001)
Discomfort: Lesbians	0.22 (.003)	0.05 (.000)
Thermometer: Gay Male	-0.22 (.001)	-0.66 (.001)
Thermometer: Lesbian	0.13 (.000)	0.42 (.001)
Total R ² (all sexual prejudice variables)	.143 ^c	.519 ^c
Egalitarianism/Nonegalitarianism (High = nonegalitarian)	0.36 ^c (.017)	0.45 ^a (.005)
Moral Traditionalism/Relativism (High = relativist)	-0.34 ^c (.015)	-0.65 ^c (.010)
Political Ideology (High = Conservative)	0.24 ^a (.005)	0.65 ^c (.007)
Religiosity	-0.05 (.000)	0.33 (.002)
Age	-0.00 (.000)	0.01 ^b (.006)
Total R ² (all variables)	.194 ^c	.565 ^c

For each independent variable, the table reports the unstandardized regression coefficient and, in parentheses, the proportion of unique R² explained by that variable. Higher scores indicate greater opposition to employment nondiscrimination laws and marriage equality. Scores for all independent variables except age were transformed to a 0-1 scale.

^a*p* < .05; ^b*p* < .01; ^c*p* < .001.

The results indicate that although policy attitudes are highly correlated with sexual prejudice, they are distinct entities that are differentially associated with different aspects of sexual prejudice. Moreover, whereas sexual prejudice is an important predictor of policy attitudes, the latter are also shaped by political and moral attitudes and values.

These findings highlight the value of distinguishing between attitudes toward sexual minorities and attitudes toward policies that affect them. Whereas the former can be understood as the internalization of sexual stigma, the latter have other psychological roots as well, including political and religious values. In terms of the conceptual framework discussed in the present chapter, the data highlight the need for empirical research on how sexual prejudice influences heterosexism through public opinion, voting behavior, political advocacy, and other means.

In practical terms, the findings confirm the intuition that changes in sexual prejudice are likely to lead to changes in attitudes toward policies affecting sexual minorities. To the extent that policy attitudes have additional social psychological sources as well, however, they might be influenced by factors other than sexual prejudice. On the one hand, this suggests that eradicating sexual prejudice will not necessarily lead to an immediate end to heterosexism insofar as the latter is perpetuated by the collective actions of individuals. On the other hand, some aspects of heterosexism (e.g., laws concerning employment discrimination) could be amenable to change even in the absence of a significant reduction in the heterosexual public's sexual prejudice. If these structural manifestations of stigma are perceived as intolerant, for example, public support for them might erode independent of changes in individual heterosexuals' prejudice.

Cultural Change and Reductions in Sexual Prejudice

In addition to asking how sexual prejudice might influence policy attitudes, it is also important to consider how events in society affect sexual prejudice. This final section of the chapter discusses how societal changes have created conditions that fostered a diminution of sexual prejudice in the United States in recent decades, with the trend toward greater tolerance and less hostility accelerating in the early 1990s.

Cultural Factors in Reducing Sexual Stigma

Using the vocabulary articulated earlier, trends in sexual prejudice over the past three decades are understood as a reflection of diminishing sexual stigma and an attendant weakening of structural heterosexism. Cultural shifts in stigma have facilitated individual attitude change, including reduced sexual prejudice among elites and opinion leaders, which, in turn, has fostered further erosion of heterosexism. These changes have come to be reflected in socialization processes, with the consequence that younger generations have different expectations, beliefs, and experiences about sexual orientation and sexual minorities, compared to their

elders. Moreover, societal changes have created new linkages between sexual prejudice and social identities. For example, expressing antigay prejudice has come to play a central role in the identities of many religious conservatives whereas tolerance for sexual minorities has become part of the identities of many liberals, libertarians, and feminists. In this section, I briefly describe some of these changes and consider their implications for individual attitudes. Recognizing that change has not been uniform throughout society, my overall focus is on the ways in which sexual stigma has diminished and sexual prejudice has abated.

To begin, three societal trends since World War II created a context for reductions in sexual stigma (Page & Shapiro, 1992). First, Americans' average level of education rose steadily after World War II. Whereas fewer than 5% of adults older than 25 had completed 4 years of college in 1940, Census data show that the figure was more than 25% by 2000. There is a well-documented association between education and many varieties of tolerance (e.g., Bobo & Licari, 1989), including heterosexuals' attitudes toward sexual minorities (e.g., Herek, 1994; Loftus, 2001; Strand, 1998). Second, the civil rights movements of the 1950s and 1960s brought about dramatic changes in White Americans' attitudes toward racial and ethnic minority groups and in institutional expressions of racism. They also created a new consciousness about the negative consequences of prejudice and discrimination for minority groups in general. Third, during the 1960s and 1970s, the feminist movement fostered changes in public attitudes toward gender roles, while the development of new contraceptive technologies led to an increased freedom to engage in heterosexual sex without fear of pregnancy. During that era, Americans' belief in a basic right to sexual privacy was reinforced by a series of US Supreme Court decisions that established constitutional rights to use contraception (*Griswold et al. v. Connecticut*, 1965; *Eisenstadt v. Baird*, 1972) and to possess erotica for private use (*Stanley v. Georgia*, 1969), as well as a qualified right to terminate a pregnancy (*Roe et al. v. Wade*, 1973). Sexual expression was increasingly recognized as a legitimate concern and sexuality became an acceptable topic in public discourse.

The gay and lesbian movement arose against this backdrop. The emergence of visible homosexual communities in large urban centers after World War II made possible the rise of a gay culture and a nascent gay political movement in the 1950s, which exploded into the national gay liberation movement after the 1969 Stonewall riots (Adam, 1995; D'Emilio, 1983). Gay people increasingly came to be regarded as a quasiethnic minority group, rather than an aggregation of deviants, criminals, or psychopaths (Epstein, 1999). To the extent that gay and lesbian (and, eventually, bisexual) people were framed as a minority group, the heterosexual public was able to accommodate their critique of discrimination and demands for rights into a pre-existing set of categories and values that had been shaped by earlier movements for civil rights for racial and ethnic minorities.

The removal of homosexuality from the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* in 1973 was a signal event for the new movement (Bayer, 1987; Minton, 2002). Until then, heterosexism rested on homosexuality's tripartite condemnation as a sin, a crime, and a sickness. When mental health professionals and behavioral scientists concluded that homo-

sexuality is not a mental illness, a principal institutional support for legitimizing sexual stigma vanished. This turnabout has had important consequences for shaping public opinion about homosexuality (Zaller, 1992).

Nevertheless, gay rights were still widely regarded as a “fringe” issue in the 1970s. However, a conservative antigay backlash – signaled by the success of Anita Bryant’s 1977 “Save Our Children” campaign in overturning a Dade County (FL) gay rights law – had the ironic effect of convincing many heterosexuals that gay people needed support because they were being persecuted by religious and political conservatives. Gay rights increasingly came to be seen as a legitimate political concern by liberals, civil libertarians, feminists, and other critics of the newly influential Christian Right. In 1980, as conservative Christian influences were coming to dominate the Republican Party, the Democrats included a gay rights plank in their party platform (Adam, 1995; Epstein, 1999).

In 1981, the first cases of what would eventually be called Acquired Immuno-deficiency Syndrome were reported among young gay men. The US AIDS epidemic was initially centered in the gay community, and AIDS provided a symbolic hook on which many opponents of gay rights hung their longstanding hostility toward nonheterosexuals (Herek & Capitanio, 1999a). The gay and lesbian community responded to AIDS by creating an extensive network of formal and informal caregiving groups and institutions, and by organizing to demand an effective government response to the health crisis while staving off the growing threats to its civil liberties. Many gay people came out to their heterosexual relatives and friends because of AIDS, either as a result of their own illness or as a political and existential response to the epidemic. Meanwhile, media coverage of the epidemic gave the gay community a more human face. It documented the rich and varied lives led by gay men with AIDS and depicted the devoted care they were receiving from their same-sex partners and their extended gay and lesbian families, often as their biological relatives rejected them because of their homosexuality. Thus, the epidemic forced many heterosexuals to think about gay men and lesbians in new ways that extended beyond sexuality: as members of their immediate family and friendship circles, coworkers, contributors to society, partners in relationships, and members of a besieged community. This more nuanced, individuated, and humanized way of perceiving gay people most likely played an important role in reducing heterosexuals’ prejudice against them (Herek, 1997; see generally Levine, Nardi, & Gagnon, 1997).

These and related events had important consequences. They increased the overall visibility of gay men and lesbians and afforded them opportunities to publicly articulate an account of homosexuality that challenged previous religious, legal, and psychiatric discourses. Consequently, heterosexuals became newly aware of the presence of sexual minorities in many sectors of society and were exposed to new information that called into question the tenets of heterosexism. In addition, historical events created new opportunities for gay and bisexual people to organize politically and to form coalitions with other interest groups. As a result, sexual minority concerns came to be integrated into value systems such as liberalism, feminism, and civil libertarianism. Sexual tolerance and the renunciation of sexual stigma

became hallmarks of the social identities associated with those value systems. Moreover, heterosexuals experienced new opportunities to have personal contact with openly gay men and lesbians.

The trend toward increased tolerance accelerated in the early 1990s, and at least three general factors probably spurred key groups of heterosexuals to change their attitudes and publicly declare their tolerance for sexual minorities around this time. First, events during the early 1990s increased the extent to which gay Americans were perceived as being under attack and thereby fostered greater sympathy for them. For example, many political moderates were disturbed by the escalating antigay discourse associated with the so-called culture wars in the 1992 Presidential campaign, as exemplified by speeches vilifying sexual minorities at the Republican national convention. State antigay ballot campaigns (e.g., in Oregon and Colorado) further identified nonheterosexuals as a persecuted minority and ultimately led to the US Supreme Court's 1996 *Romer v. Evans* decision, which marked a significant departure from the Court's previous hostility to the gay community as articulated in its 1986 *Bowers v. Hardwick* ruling (Herman, 1997; Keen & Goldberg, 1998). More generally, the increasing linkage of antigay politics to the Christian Right further solidified coalitions between gay people and pro-choice and feminist voters, civil libertarians, liberals, and like-minded others. The widespread visibility and concern afforded to antigay hate crimes further increased public sympathy for sexual minorities.

Second, the early 1990s saw an increase in public discussion of homosexuality as an inborn characteristic, spurred by several widely publicized scientific reports claiming to have found biological correlates of male sexual orientation (e.g., Hamer, Hu, Magnuson, Hu, & Pattatucci, 1993; LeVay, 1991). Among heterosexuals, the belief that homosexuality is innate is correlated with more favorable attitudes toward gay people and greater support for gay rights, whereas the belief that it is chosen is associated with sexual prejudice and opposition to gay rights (Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2005; Herek & Capitanio, 1995; Whitley, 1990; Wood & Bartkowski, 2004). The psychological sources of this correlation are debatable (Hegarty, 2002; Hegarty & Golden, 2008), but attributions about the origin of sexual orientation clearly play an important role in justifying many heterosexuals' attitudes.

Third, major opinion leaders emerged as proponents of gay rights. Perhaps the most notable such figure in the early 1990s was President Bill Clinton. Although his term in office included enactment of legislation hostile to gay people – most notably the military's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy and the Defense of Marriage Act – he was the first US President to align himself with the gay community and articulate a progay civil rights message.

The events described here signaled a significant erosion in sexual stigma's previously monolithic façade. They fostered a sea change in heterosexuals' perceptions of gay men and lesbians – and in the gay community's perceptions of itself – from the once prevalent view that homosexuals comprised a small, dysfunctional aggregation of isolated, mentally ill individuals to the widespread perception that gay people constitute a quasiethnic minority group whose members are valuable,

contributing members of society. Changes in sexual prejudice at the individual level should be understood against this backdrop.

As a result of this shift in the cultural contours of sexual stigma, social norms have changed in many segments of society. Liberals, civil libertarians, feminists, and many who simply consider themselves fair-minded now perceive that sexual prejudice is incompatible with their personal value systems. Such individuals are likely to experience discomfort if they feel that their reactions to sexual minorities are inconsistent with their personal standards of being unprejudiced (Devine, Monteith, Zuwerink, & Elliot, 1991).

Social psychological research suggests that deeply rooted prejudices do not disappear simply because they are accompanied by inner conflicts and guilt (Devine, 2005). The mere experience of compunction in relation to prejudice is not always sufficient to overcome the entrenched habits of thinking that underlie it, and even heterosexuals who eschew prejudice against sexual minorities may have difficulty changing their negative attitudes (e.g., Devine, 1989; Monteith, Sherman, & Devine, 1998). This is because well-learned aspects of internalized stigma are manifested as immediate, reflexive responses to the stigmatized group (e.g., Pryor, Reeder, Yeadon, & Hesson-McInnis, 2004). These responses are largely automatic, although they can be subsequently overridden by more reflective, purposeful thought processes which enable the individual to refrain from applying stereotypes that have been activated (Devine, 1998; Kunda & Spencer, 2003). Over time, people can learn to suppress the activation of those stereotypes in the first place, especially if they have a strong intrinsic motivation to inhibit their ingrained prejudiced responses to outgroups (Dunton & Fazio, 1997; Plant & Devine, 1998; Ratcliff, Lassiter, Markman, & Snyder, 2006). Thus, individuals can learn how to be unprejudiced, provided they have sufficient motivation to do so.

What might motivate heterosexuals to disavow their sexual prejudice? In this regard, it is instructive to consider the experiences of many sexual minority individuals in overcoming their own internalization of sexual stigma. Because most children are raised with the expectation that they will be heterosexual, sexual stigma is internalized by many boys and girls who will eventually grow up to be gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Unlike heterosexuals, however, they experience a conflict between their negative view of homosexuality and their own sexual and romantic feelings. Successfully resolving this conflict requires that individuals reconcile their attitudes toward homosexuality with their experience of their own sexuality. Although this is fairly unproblematic for some, it is a challenging, slow, and painful process for many. They are motivated to get through it by their need for a positive and integrated sense of self (see generally Bieschke, Perez, & DeBord, 2006; Herek & Garnets, 2007).

Heterosexuals are unlikely to experience comparable conflicts about their sexuality as a result of sexual stigma. As noted earlier, however, they may be motivated to confront their own sexual prejudice if they experience it as inconsistent with their self concept. Such ego-dystonic prejudice may arise simply from an individual's perceived inconsistencies between her or his self-concept and attitudes. However,

it seems especially likely among heterosexuals with a strong, positive emotional bond with a sexual minority person, especially a gay, lesbian, or bisexual close friend or family member. Because of the societal changes noted earlier, heterosexuals' opportunities for having such a relationship have expanded significantly. The implications of this development are considered next.

Personal Contact and Prejudice Reduction

Heterosexuals who personally know gay men or lesbians have been consistently found to express more accepting attitudes toward gay people as a group, compared to their counterparts lacking such contact (Herek & Capitanio, 1996; Lewis, 2006). In part, this association reflects gay people's selective disclosure to heterosexuals whom they expect to be supportive. However, gay people often do not have control over who knows about their sexual orientation. In the 1990s, for example, only about one-third of heterosexuals who personally knew a gay man or lesbian were told about the latter's sexual orientation directly by the sexual minority individual; most learned about it from a third party or simply guessed (Herek & Capitanio, 1996). This pattern held in the 2005 telephone survey described earlier: About 41% of respondents said they first learned about a friend or relative's sexual orientation directly from the gay or lesbian individual, whereas the majority learned about it from a third party (32%) or said they had guessed or "always knew" (27%).

There are empirical grounds for believing that a causal relationship exists between knowing a gay person and the diminution of sexual prejudice. Longitudinal data indicate that heterosexuals' contact experiences predict their subsequent prejudice reduction to a greater extent than initially low levels of prejudice predict having subsequent contact experiences (Herek & Capitanio, 1996). In addition, when heterosexuals are matched on other relevant characteristics, those reporting personal contact have significantly lower levels of sexual prejudice and are more supportive of policies benefiting sexual minorities than are those without contact (Lewis, 2007).

Moreover, there are strong theoretical reasons for expecting heterosexuals' personal experiences with gay men and lesbians to result in lower levels of prejudice. As formulated by Allport (1954), the contact hypothesis predicts that prejudice will be reduced by contact between majority and minority group members in the pursuit of common goals. Allport noted that contact's beneficial effects are enhanced to the extent that it is "sanctioned by institutional supports" and "leads to the perception of common interests and common humanity between members of the two groups" (Allport, p. 281). A large body of empirical research supports the contact hypothesis and indicates that, although the four conditions specified by Allport (equal group status, common goals, intergroup cooperation, institutional support) are not essential for contact to decrease intergroup hostility, their presence typically leads to even greater prejudice reduction (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

Pettigrew (1998) has suggested that contact situations fostering the development of friendship between group members are the most likely to reduce prejudice, in part because intergroup friendship potentially invokes all four of the facilitative factors identified by Allport (Pettigrew, 1998). Moreover, such contact is likely to increase heterosexuals' knowledge about sexual minorities, foster a capacity for greater empathy for them, and reduce anxieties about interacting with them, all of which are likely to be associated with decreases in prejudice (Pettigrew, 1998; Stephan & Finlay, 1999; Stephan & Stephan, 1985). To the extent that heterosexuals have multiple lesbian or gay friends, these beneficial effects of contact should increase. In addition, knowing multiple members of a stigmatized group is more likely to foster recognition of that group's variability than is knowing only one group member (Wilder, 1978) and may reduce the likelihood that nonstereotypical behavior is discounted as atypical (Rothbart & John, 1985).

When group membership is readily evident, as is often the case with race or ethnicity, any situation that brings different groups into contact is likely to make the participants' respective category memberships immediately salient. By contrast, because sexual orientation is usually concealable, heterosexuals often have contact with sexual minority individuals without being aware of it. Such contact even includes longstanding friendships and family relationships. Indeed, because most gay, lesbian, and bisexual adults do not recognize their sexual orientation until adolescence or adulthood, their circle of family and friends typically includes people who knew them before they themselves were aware of their minority status. Thus, although initial categorization according to readily apparent characteristics plays an important role in the impression formation process (e.g., Fiske, Lin, & Neuberg, 1999), nonvisible characteristics such as sexual orientation often are not part of that process. Hence, many relationships between heterosexuals and sexual minority individuals become established before the former knows about the latter's sexual orientation.

This fact is important for analyzing the social and psychological processes whereby heterosexuals' contact experiences with specific lesbians and gay men may lead to reduced prejudice toward sexual minorities as a group. In trying to understand the factors that affect whether the beneficial effects of specific contact experiences generalize to reduce prejudice against the group as a whole, social psychologists have focused on the salience of group categories during contact situations. Brewer and Miller (1984) proposed that contact is optimal in reducing prejudice when the salience of intergroup boundaries is minimized, a situation that fosters differentiation and personalization of outgroup individuals. Rather than perceiving outgroup members as a homogeneous group, the ingroup member learns that they have distinctive characteristics and comes to respond to them in terms of relationships to the self rather than their category membership (Brewer & Miller, 1984). A competing perspective notes that if outgroup members are perceived entirely as individuals, the positive effects of contact are unlikely to generalize to the outgroup as a whole. Thus, maintaining the salience of category membership is necessary for the contact experience to translate into a reduction in prejudice (Brown & Hewstone, 2005). A third perspective, the Common Group Identity Model, proposes that the effects of contact will be best generalized when the

categories of ingroup and outgroup are transcended by a superordinate category that includes both (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005b).

These three perspectives have not proved to be as incompatible as they might first appear (Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Dovidio, Gaertner, & Kawakami, 2003; Miller, 2002). For present purposes, it is relevant to recall that much of the research on which they are based involved racial and ethnic prejudice. Contact between heterosexuals and sexual minorities, as noted earlier, often has quite different dynamics. Instead of involving strangers whose respective group memberships constitute some of the first information available, contact between heterosexual people and sexual minority individuals often involves revelation of the latter's status within the context of an already established relationship. When heterosexuals learn about a friend or relative's homosexuality or bisexuality, an intergroup relationship is imposed on the preexisting interpersonal relationship. To the extent that the qualities of that personal relationship – including positive affect, individuation, and personalization – are carried over to the new intergroup relationship, it is likely that the heterosexual individual will be able to generalize from her or his feelings toward the sexual minority individual to a more positive attitude toward lesbians and gay men as a group.

This dynamic is perhaps most likely to occur in the case of close friendships (Pettigrew, 1998). Having a lesbian or gay close friend may lead a heterosexual person to reconceptualize her or his most important group affiliations, such that she or he feels a common group membership with sexual minorities (e.g., Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005a). In this process of recategorization, the ingroup may become more broadly defined so that it now includes nonheterosexuals. What is necessary is for the relationship to survive the revelation of the new information about the friend's sexual orientation. It is important, for example, that the heterosexual person not perceive the new information about her or his friend's sexual orientation as calling into question all of her or his prior knowledge about and impressions of the friend, which could lead to a negative recategorization of the individual (e.g., Fiske et al., 1999) rather than the outgroup. This outcome is less likely to occur when the heterosexual and the sexual minority person openly discuss the latter's experiences.

Data from the previously described 2005 telephone survey support the hypotheses that contact is most likely to reduce sexual prejudice when heterosexuals know multiple sexual minority individuals, when those contacts include emotionally close relationships, and when the relationships include open discussion of what it means to be a sexual minority. [Table 4](#) reports mean ATL and ATG, feeling thermometer, and discomfort scores for respondents who reported having no gay or lesbian friends or relatives vs. those who reported any such contact.¹³ The latter

¹³ Respondents were asked “How many friends, relatives, or close acquaintances have you ever had who were gay, lesbian, or homosexual?” A total of 80% reported having at least one such contact. When asked about their sole or closest relationship, 30% characterized the gay or lesbian person as a close friend, 44% as an acquaintance or distant friend, 10% as an immediate family member, and 16% as a relative outside the immediate family. In addition to the 41% who first learned about the gay or lesbian person's sexual orientation through the latter's self-disclosure, another 10% said they had talked with her or him about being lesbian or gay.

Table 4 Mean feeling thermometers scores, ATG and ATG scores, and discomfort levels by contact variables (national sample)

Contact variable	ATLG		Thermometer		Discomfort	
	ATG	ATL	Gay Male	Lesbian	Gay Men	Lesbians
No G/L friend, acquaintance, or relative	3.27 (3.13–3.40)	3.07 (2.92–3.21)	23.6 (19.88–27.25)	28.7 (24.3–33.1)	3.04 (2.87–3.21)	2.70 (2.54–2.86)
G/L friend, acquaintance, or relative	2.60 (2.54–2.67)	2.41 (2.34–2.48)	53.1 (51.0–55.1)	54.8 (52.8–56.9)	1.97 (1.90–2.04)	1.92 (1.85–1.98)
Lesbian/gay close friend	2.33 (2.20–2.45)	2.09 (1.98–2.21)	61.10 (57.52–64.69)	61.81 (58.34–65.29)	1.65 (1.54–1.76)	1.69 (1.58–1.80)
Contact without discussion	2.83 (2.74–2.92)	2.61 (2.52–2.71)	47.45 (44.40–50.49)	49.28 (46.31–52.26)	2.19 (2.09–2.29)	2.11 (2.01–2.20)
Contact with discussion	2.36 (2.26–2.46)	2.20 (2.10–2.29)	59.09 (56.42–61.77)	60.44 (57.78–63.11)	1.73 (1.64–1.82)	1.73 (1.64–1.81)

For each contact variable, the table reports the mean score and, in parentheses, the 95% CI. ATG and ATL scores can range from 1 (low prejudice) to 4 (high prejudice). Thermometer scores can range from 0 (least favorable) to 100 (most favorable). Discomfort scores can range from 1 (“very comfortable”) to 4 (“very uncomfortable”).

group is further divided according to whether the respondent’s reported contact was described as a close friend (vs. a relative or acquaintance), and whether or not the respondent reported ever having discussed that person’s sexual orientation with her or him. For ease of comparison, 95% confidence intervals (CIs) are reported for each parameter estimate. Nonoverlapping CIs can be interpreted as indicating reliable differences between groups.

Comparing rows 1 and 2 in Table 4, it is clear that heterosexuals with contact experiences have substantially more positive reactions to sexual minorities as a group, compared to heterosexuals without such experiences. Moreover, those reactions are even more positive when the gay or lesbian individual is a close friend (row 3) and when he or she has talked with the heterosexual person about what it is like to be lesbian or gay (row 4 vs. row 5).

To assess the relative importance of the different features of contact in predicting sexual prejudice, Table 5 reports the results of a series of OLS regression analyses. Scores on the various sexual prejudice measures were predicted simultaneously by the respondent’s number of relationships with gay men and with lesbians, whether or not the respondent reported having a gay or lesbian close friend, and whether or not the respondent reported having discussed the friend or relative’s sexual orientation with her or him. As the table shows, the number of contacts reported by respondents consistently accounts for the greatest proportion of unique variance, with the number of lesbian contacts playing an especially important role in predicting responses to lesbians. By contrast, reactions to gay men tend to be explained by both gay male and lesbian contacts. In addition, consistent with the research cited earlier, defining the relationship as a friendship and having openly discussed the friend or relative’s sexual orientation also account for additional variance.

Table 5 OLS regression equations with contact variables as predictors of sexual prejudice scores

Independent variable	ATLG		Thermometer		Discomfort	
	ATG	ATL	Gay male	Lesbian	Gay men	Lesbians
Number of gay male contacts	-0.05 ^c (.017)	-0.02 ^a (.004)	1.60 ^c (.015)	1.04 ^c (.007)	-0.08 ^c (.035)	-0.02 ^a (.003)
Number of lesbian contacts	-0.05 ^c (.017)	-0.07 ^c (.025)	1.90 ^c (.020)	2.33 ^c (.030)	-0.05 ^c (.011)	-0.08 ^c (.038)
Closest relationship is close friend?	-0.22 ^b (.008)	-0.31 ^c (.015)	7.90 ^c (.009)	6.16 ^b (.006)	-0.31 ^c (.012)	-0.19 ^b (.005)
Any conversation about being gay/lesbian?	-0.33 ^c (.022)	-0.30 ^c (.018)	11.08 ^c (.023)	9.80 ^c (.018)	-0.41 ^c (.028)	-0.30 ^c (.017)
Total R ²	.178 ^c	.158 ^c	.182 ^c	.158 ^c	.227 ^c	.157 ^c

For each independent variable, the table reports the unstandardized regression coefficient and, in parentheses, the independent R² associated with that variable. ATG and ATL scores can range from 1 (low prejudice) to 4 (high prejudice). Thermometer scores can range from 0 (least favorable) to 100 (most favorable). Discomfort scores can range from 1 (“very comfortable”) to 4 (“very uncomfortable”).

^a*p* < .05; ^b*p* < .01; ^c*p* < .001.

Thus, two factors that account for reductions in sexual prejudice at the individual level are an increase in heterosexuals' personal contact with openly gay and lesbian people and a redefinition of heterosexuals' personal identities such that rejecting sexual prejudice is integral to them. These developments have been made possible by a confluence of cultural changes since World War II.

Conclusion

In the present chapter, I have proposed a general framework for thinking about sexual prejudice in its cultural context. Moving beyond "homophobia," this framework begins with the construct of stigma and distinguishes between its structural and individual manifestations, with the latter further differentiated into enacted, felt, and internalized stigma. This conceptual road map offers insights into heterosexuals' and sexual minorities' experiences of stigma; the connections between societal stigma and individual heterosexuals' attitudes toward gay, lesbian, and bisexual people; and between sexual prejudice and social policy. Perhaps most importantly, it can provide a vocabulary and directions for future research that will better describe and explain sexual stigma and prejudice, and ultimately will offer insights into how they can be eradicated.

Appendix: Questionnaire and Survey Studies Methodology

Student Questionnaire Study

The data reported here were collected during a single academic quarter as part of an ongoing study of attitudes conducted with students at the University of California at Davis. One goal of the study was to assess the continuing utility of the ATLG as a measure of sexual prejudice and to construct brief measures of related constructs.

A large pool of items was assembled using the ATLG (Herek, 1994) and other measures of heterosexuals' responses to gay men and lesbians (Altemeyer, 1996; Kite & Deaux, 1986; Larsen, Reed, & Hoffman, 1980; Ricketts & Hudson, 1998; Wright, Adams, & Bernat, 1999) as sources. Duplicate items and items with substantially overlapping meaning were eliminated, and some new items were constructed. Two parallel versions of this lengthy questionnaire were administered, one in which all of the statements applied to lesbians and female homosexuality, another in which they targeted gay men and male homosexuality. Respondents were randomly assigned to receive either the lesbian ($n=122$) or gay male ($n=120$) questionnaire. In addition, all questionnaires included the 3-item versions of both the ATL and ATG, separate feeling thermometers for *gay men* and for *lesbians*, the Protestant Ethic and Humanitarian scales (Katz & Hass, 1988), measures of religiosity and political ideology, and demographic questions.

The items concerning sexual minorities were organized into three main sections relevant to the present chapter (a) attitudes toward gay men, lesbians, or homosexuality (including the ATLG items); (b) affective responses to actual and hypothetical interactions with a gay man or lesbian; and (c) attitudes toward policies related to sexual minorities and sexual orientation.

Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men

Responses to the items assessing attitudes toward gay men and lesbian were submitted to a principal components analysis with oblique rotation. The results were consistent with the original ATLG Condemnation-Tolerance factor. Although three factors emerged for the gay male items and two factors emerged for the lesbian items, they were conceptually similar and highly intercorrelated ($0.23 < |r| < 0.71$). Thus, it seemed warranted to consider them all facets of the same construct that is measured by the ATLG. This hypothesis was tested with the 30 items that loaded highly on at least one factor. The three items comprising the short ATL/ATG were removed and the remaining 27 items were combined into single scales of attitudes toward gay men and attitudes toward lesbians, with item scoring reversed as appropriate. As expected, both scales displayed a high level of internal consistency ($\alpha=0.97$ for each). Total scores on each 27-item scale were highly correlated with the respective 3-item ATLG counterpart (between the gay male scale and the ATG, $r=0.82$; between the lesbian scale and the ATL, $r=0.85$). Given these high correlations and the ATLG's well-documented reliability and validity with national probability samples (Herek, 2002a; Herek & Capitanio, 1996, 1999b), the short versions of the ATL and ATG were used in the present study as measures of sexual prejudice.

Affective Responses to Lesbians and Gay Men

Brief measures were created to assess respondents' affective response to the prospect of interactions with gay men and with lesbians. They were based on items from the Index of Attitudes Toward Homosexuals, or IAH (Ricketts & Hudson, 1998) — a revised version of the Index of Homophobia (Hudson & Ricketts, 1980) — which ascertains respondents' anticipated affective response in 25 hypothetical situations. Building on the fact that nearly two-thirds of the IAH items assess anticipated comfort or discomfort or related feelings (“at ease,” “nervous,” “bothered”), a more homogeneous scale was constructed by rephrasing the remaining items so that all of them focused on comfort or discomfort. Items from other sexual prejudice measures that assessed levels of comfort in hypothetical social situations were also included.

Based on principal components analyses of these items, a 10-item Social Discomfort Questionnaire (SDQ) was constructed to assess respondents' discomfort in social situations with gay men (SDQ-G, $\alpha=0.96$) and lesbians (SDQ-L,

$\alpha=0.95$). For each version of the scale, respondents were asked “How comfortable would you feel in each of the following situations?” Response options were *very comfortable*, *fairly comfortable*, *somewhat comfortable*, *somewhat uncomfortable*, *fairly uncomfortable*, *very uncomfortable*. The items for the SDQ-L are (1) Working closely with a lesbian; (2) Learning that I will have a lesbian as my work supervisor; (3) Learning that a neighbor is a lesbian; (4) Learning that my daughter’s teacher is a lesbian; (5) Learning that a longtime friend is a lesbian; (6) Learning that a family member is a lesbian; (7) Attending a social function where lesbians are present; (8) Being in a group of lesbians; (9) Talking with a lesbian at a party; and (10) Seeing two women holding hands in public.

Policy Attitudes

Based on a principal components analysis with oblique rotation, gay male and lesbian versions of three scales assessing policy attitudes were constructed, each employing a 7-point Likert-type response format ranging from *very strongly agree* to *very strongly disagree*. They included a 4-item Marriage Equality (ME) scale ($\alpha=0.94$ for the gay male version [ME-G], $\alpha=0.95$ for the lesbian version [ME-L]), a 2-item Military Personnel Policy (MPP) scale ($\alpha=0.79$ for the MPP-G and 0.82 for the MPP-L), and a 3-item Childcare and Teaching Policy (CTP) scale ($\alpha=0.92$ for the CTP-G and 0.94 for the CTP-L). High scores on each scale indicate an antigay or antilesbian policy stance.

The ME-L items are (1) Lesbian couples should be allowed to marry legally, the same as heterosexual couples; (2) Allowing women to marry other women would hurt the institution of marriage (Reverse-scored); (3) Allowing marriage between two women would be a good thing for society; and (4) The idea of lesbian marriages seems ridiculous to me (Reverse-scored).

The MPP-L items are (1) Openly lesbian women should be allowed to join the military and (2) Whether or not a woman is lesbian should have no bearing on her ability to join the Armed Services.

The CTP-L items are (1) Lesbians should be barred from teaching school; (2) Elementary schools should be able to fire a female teacher for being lesbian; and (3) I think lesbians should be prohibited from working with children. All items on the CTP scale are reverse-scored.

National Telephone Survey

The data for these analyses were collected between August 1 and October 27, 2005, from a national probability sample of English-speaking US adults (≥ 18 years) who were eligible to vote.¹⁴ The total sample comprised 2,114 respondents and

¹⁴Data collection was conducted by The Henne Group and funded by the Gill Foundation. I express my sincere appreciation to Jeff Henne, Ethan Geto, and Murray Edelman for their assistance and support in this project.

included partially overlapping oversamples of African Americans ($n=444$), Latinos ($n=461$), and California residents ($n=560$). However, not all modules of the survey were administered to all respondents, and some respondents declined to answer specific questions. For the analyses presented here, the minimum sample size was $n=1,311$ for the analyses of marriage policy attitudes, $n=1,332$ for the analyses of employment policy attitudes, and $n=1,906$ for the analyses of contact variables.

All interviews were conducted using computer-assisted telephone interviewing, with each respondent selected at random from adults residing in the household. Up to 12 calls were attempted for each telephone number in the sample. The data were weighted by the number of adults residing in the household and the number of telephone lines, and were poststratified by gender, race and ethnicity, age, geographic region, and education, based on data from the most recent Current Population Survey (CPS) conducted by the US Census Bureau for the population of adults 18 and older. Because the use of weighted data necessitates special analytic techniques to correct standard errors (Lee & Forthofer, 2006), analyses were conducted using STATA and SPSS Complex Samples, which permit such correction.

Three measures of sexual prejudice were included: (a) the 3-item versions of the ATL and ATG with four response alternatives (*strongly agree*, *agree somewhat*, *disagree somewhat*, and *strongly disagree* — these four response alternatives were also used with other items described later), (b) feeling thermometers assessing reactions to gay men and to lesbians, and (c) single-item assessments of personal discomfort with gay men and with lesbians (e.g., “In general, how comfortable do you feel around men who are gay or homosexual — very comfortable, somewhat comfortable, somewhat uncomfortable, or very uncomfortable?”). Respondents’ attitudes toward passing a federal law to ensure that gay men and lesbians have equal rights in employment and toward allowing or forbidding marriage between two people of the same sex were assessed.¹⁵

Along with demographic variables, the survey also included questions about political ideology, religiosity, and the extent to which respondents reported having had close personal contact with lesbians and gay men. In addition, to assess general values that might affect policy attitudes independent of sexual prejudice, two items were included that have been shown to predict policy attitudes related to sexual orientation (Brewer, 2003). One item measures general nonegalitarian values (“We have gone too far in pushing equal rights in this country”) and the other measures moral traditionalism vs. relativism (“The world is changing, and we should adjust our view of moral behavior to those changes”). Both items used the same four response alternatives as the ATLG items. To facilitate interpretation of the regression analyses reported in Table 3, all independent variables except age were recoded as dummy variables (categorical variables) or as 0–1 (scales and ordinal variables).

¹⁵The survey included experimental manipulations of the wording of the policy items. However, these manipulations did not significantly affect the response patterns and are not considered here.

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