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CHAPTER 2

ANTI-GAY/LESBIAN VIOLENCE IN THE UNITED STATES

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During the Gulf War, a Los Angeles delicatessen owned by an Arab-American was set ablaze. Before igniting the fire the arsonists scribbled a message on a wall

“You Fuckin’ Arab, go home.”

On December 19, 1986, a group of white teenagers in Howard Beach shouting “There’s niggers on the boulevard. Let’s kill them,” chased three black men. One escaped, another was severely beaten, and a third was beaten and while trying to escape his pursuers he was run over by car on the Belt Parkway.

In 1990, in Madison, Wisconsin, unidentified vandals smashed the windows and cut the brake lines of a bus that was supposed to take Jewish children to a day camp. The sabotage was discovered but the climate of anti-Semitism became so dangerous in Madison that armed police had to be stationed outside local synagogues during Rosh Hashanah.

HATE CRIMES

Violent acts, such as those described above by Jack Levin and Jack McDevitt (1993), are often called *hate crimes*. “Hate crimes are words or actions intended to harm or intimidate an individual because of her or his membership in a minority group; they include violent assaults, murder, rape, and property crimes motivated by prejudice, as well as threats of violence and other acts of intimidation” (Finn & McNeil, 1987, p. 2). In the United States, hate crimes are committed against racial, ethnic, religious, and sexual minorities. According to official reports, racial bias results in approximately 60 percent of all hate crimes in the United States, with African-Americans being the most vulnerable to hate crimes. Crimes committed against people because of their religious affiliation rank second, while crimes committed against people because of their sexual orientation rank third. It should be noted that according to FBI statistics, most hate crimes based on religion are property crimes directed at religious institutions, i.e., vandalism of synagogues, churches, and cemeteries (Garofalo, 1997). Formal reports from the Department of Justice and other law enforcement agencies as well as informal reports from such groups as the Southern Poverty Law Center’s Klanwatch, the Anti-Defamation League, and the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs indicate that hate and bias crimes and acts of violence are on the rise.

Hate violence is *a form of terrorism*. Hate violence traumatizes not only the direct victim but all members of the targeted group. Richard Berk, Elizabeth Boyd, and Karl Hamner (1992) note that a key ingredient of hate-motivated violence is the “symbolic status of the victim” (p. 127). As Greg Herek points out, bias crimes “are especially serious because they potentially victimize an entire class of people...they assail the victim’s identity and intimidate other group members”

(1989, p. 948).

ANTI-GAY/LESBIAN HATE CRIMES: OVERT, DIRECT, EPISODIC VIOLENCE

In Nashville, Tennessee vandals ransacked the home of a gay minister, scrawling “homo” and “fag” on his possessions. (National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 1989)

In Los Angeles, a man yelling “sick mother-fucker” threw a beaker of acid into the face of a lesbian employee of the local Gay and Lesbian Community Services Center. (National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 1986)

A 21-year-old University of Wyoming student was pistol whipped and then left lashed to a fence in the near freezing cold outside of Laramie. He was found after 10 hours and died after five days in a coma.

Gay men and lesbian women, as well as other sexual minorities, including bisexual and transgendered men and women, are frequent targets of hate crimes in the United States. The Southern Poverty Law Center has estimated that gay men and lesbians are six times as likely to be physically attacked as Jews and Hispanics in America, and twice as likely as African Americans. Valerie Jenness and Kendal Broad note: “By many accounts, violence motivated by homophobia and heterosexism represents the most visible, violent, and culturally legitimated type of ‘hate crime’ in this country” (1994, p. 402). (See Comstock, 1991, for a good historical review of the ebbs and flows of anti-gay/lesbian violence in the United States.)

Official statistics on hate crimes are an inaccurate measure of anti-gay lesbian violence.

Many gay men and lesbian women do not report verbal harassment or physical violence against them to the authorities because they fear that they will be subjected to *secondary victimization* at the hands of police or others who may learn of their sexual orientation and subject the victim to a second round of mistreatment (Herek & Berrill, 1992). Greg Herek, Roy Gillis, Jeanine Cogan, and Eric Glunt (1997) found that while approximately two-thirds of lesbian and gay victims of non-bias crimes reported the incident to law enforcement authorities, only about one-third of the hate crime victims did so. In a study on sexual orientation hate crimes in Los Angeles, Edward Dunbar (1998) reported that gay and lesbian people of color were both more likely to be victimized and less likely to report the hate act than European white gay men and lesbian women.

On November 11, 1996, a young gay teenage boy, who had just come out to a friend earlier that morning, was verbally harassed and physically assaulted by three youths as he walked home from school. He sustained injuries to his neck, head, and chest from being kicked, punched, and spit upon for being a “sissy” and “a fucking fag.” He told his parents that he received the injuries during a soccer game. (National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, 1997)

In El Paso, Texas, a gay man was assaulted by his cousin, brother, and father during a wedding reception because of his sexual orientation. The man drove himself to the hospital for x-rays and emergency treatment. When asked why he was there, he told a male nurse what had happened and was advised not to disclose his sexual orientation to anyone else at the hospital because “they won’t treat you right.” The victim declined to report either incident to the police or hospital administration. (National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, 1997)

Since official statistics only record those who have reported the attack, many researchers survey samples of gay and lesbian communities to determine the rates of hate violence. Reviewing these surveys, Greg Herek (1989) reports as many as 92 percent of lesbian women and gay men responded that they have been the targets of anti-gay verbal abuse or threats, and as many as 24 percent report physical attacks because of their sexual orientation. In a survey of Sacramento-area adults, Herek, et al (1997) found that, since age 16, 11 percent had experienced assault with a weapon, based on their sexual orientation; 14 percent had experienced assault without a weapon; 17 percent vandalism; 45 percent had been threatened with violence; 32 percent had been chased or followed; 33 percent had objects thrown at them; and the overwhelming majority had been verbally harassed. However, Herek and his colleagues (Herek & Berrill, 1992; Herek, Gillis, Cogan, & Glunt, 1997) note the methodological problems of these types of self-report surveys, including memory limitations, difficulties in question interpretation, and variations in how one decides if a crime was motivated by sexual orientation. Furthermore, most studies of anti-gay/lesbian violence have adults as their subjects. (For a discussion of violence against lesbian and gay youth see Hershberger and D'Augelli, 1995.)

CHARACTERISTICS OF ANTI-GAY/LESBIAN HATE VIOLENCE

A number of studies have been conducted to understand the nature of hate crimes. These studies have focused on the characteristics of the perpetrators and the circumstances in which hate crimes occur.

1. The perpetrators of anti-gay/lesbian violence (and most hate crimes) are predominately male teenagers and young adults (Herek et al., 1997; LeBlanc, 1991). In a survey of almost 500 community college students, Karen Franklin (1998) found that 18 percent of the men said

that they had physically assaulted or threatened someone they thought was gay or lesbian compared to 4 percent of the women. Thirty-two percent of the men and 17 percent of the women said that they were guilty of verbal harassment.

2. Anti-gay/lesbian violence frequently happens in groups (Comstock, 1991; Garofalo & Martin, 1993). Groups increase violence through social contagion (LeBon, 1896) and deindividuation (Festinger, Pepitone, & Newcomb, 1952; Zimbardo, 1970). People in groups don't feel personally responsible for their behavior—often thinking, “It is the group, not me, who is doing this.”
3. The targets of anti-gay and lesbian attacks are often unknown to the perpetrator and chosen at random (Garofalo & Martin, 1993; Lane, 1990). This randomness may make it harder for the person to cope with the consequences than if he or she was a victim of some other crime. Victims may feel that there is nothing they could have done to prevent the attack, especially since they were attacked for something over which they feel they have no control and which may be a key aspect of their personal identity—their sexual orientation (Garnetts, Herek, & Levy, 1990; Herek, Gillis, Cogan, & Glunt, 1997).
4. Anti-gay/lesbian violence is particularly brutal. Kevin Berrill, formerly the director of the Anti-Violence Project of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF), reports that homosexual murder victims are less likely to be shot than to be “stabbed a dozen or more times, mutilated and strangled” (Miller & Humphreys, 1980, cited in Berrill, 1992, p. 25). The director of Victim Services at Bellevue Hospital in New York City has stated that “attacks against gay men were the most heinous and brutal I encountered. They frequently involved torture, cutting, mutilation and beating, and showed the absolute intent to rub out the

human being because of his [sexual] preference” (M. Mertz, cited in Berrill, 1992, p. 25).

STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE AGAINST GAY MEN AND LESBIAN WOMEN

But overt acts of violence against lesbian women and gay men are only the most visible and heinous offenses in a pattern of discrimination and oppression. Gay men and lesbian women face *structural violence* as well as direct episodic violence. The structural violence against gay men and lesbian women is the result of heterosexism. Herek (1992) defines *heterosexism* as “an ideological system that denies, denigrates, and stigmatizes any nonheterosexual form of behavior, identity, relationship, or community” (p. 89). Herek distinguishes between psychological heterosexism which is manifested “in individual attitudes and behaviors” and *cultural heterosexism* which is manifested “in societal customs and institutions, such as religion and the legal system” (p. 89). It is this cultural heterosexism that results in structural violence against lesbian women and gay men.

As a result of cultural heterosexism, gay men, lesbian women, and other sexual minorities suffer *discrimination* in many areas, including housing and employment.

Margarethe Cammemeyer, a Bronze-Star winner and 28-year military veteran, was dismissed from the army despite a stellar record of service to her country (Cathcart, 1998).

Sherry Barone faced a cold-hearted cemetery which refused to include the epitaph “life partner” on the tombstone of her late partner, Cynthia Friedman, despite a legally executed request by Cynthia to do so. (Cathcart, 1998)

Only ten states currently offer *civil rights protections* to lesbian women and gay men. In most

states, they have no legal recourse if they are discriminated against. In the last 20 years, with the rise of the gay rights movement, there have been attempts to pass legislation that would protect gay and lesbian civil rights. However, for every effort to increase protections for gay and lesbian civil rights, there have been countermoves to take them away. A recent Vatican statement to U.S. bishops supports discrimination against gay men and lesbian women and urges Catholics to oppose the passage of civil rights for gay men and lesbian women. In 1992, the state of Colorado passed a referendum which prohibits the state and all its agencies from acting on any claim of discrimination by a lesbian or gay man. (Note that the Supreme Court has issued an injunction against it.) That same year, a stronger initiative in Oregon stating that public institutions including the schools “shall assist in setting a standard for Oregon’s youth that recognizes homosexuality...*as abnormal, wrong, unnatural and perverse and...to be discouraged and avoided*” [italics added] was defeated but received support from 44 percent of the voters. And, in 1998, opponents of lesbian/gay civil rights successfully sought to repeal a gay civil rights law in Maine.

Not only do gay men and lesbian women have few laws to protect them from discrimination, but many laws themselves are discriminatory. Gary Comstock (1991) points out that U.S. laws have enabled legalized violence against homosexuals. In the past, *sodomy laws* made same-gendered sex punishable by the death penalty. Although capital punishment for same-sex relations was removed from the books and corporal punishment is no longer in use, engaging in same-gender sexual acts is still illegal in 22 states. In 1986, the Supreme Court upheld the right of states to prosecute adults for engaging in consensual sexual acts with each other in the privacy of their own home (*Bowers vs. Hardwick*, 1986).

In addition to legal sanctions against lesbians and gays for engaging in same sex acts, there

are other *discriminatory laws*. Gay men and lesbian women have no legal right to marry. Laws prohibit them from disclosing their sexual orientation in the military. They can be denied family health insurance policies and visiting rights in hospitals since they are not legally “family members.”

SOME PSYCHOLOGICAL EXPLANATIONS OF ANTI-GAY/LESBIAN VIOLENCE

Psychologists have a long history of attempting to understand what causes prejudice and violence. These approaches have focused primarily on intrapsychic and interpersonal psychological processes.

Authoritarian Personalities

In keeping with psychology’s emphasis on understanding individual behaviors, one of the earliest explanations of prejudice was based on individual personality. People who were prejudiced shared characteristics referred to as an *authoritarian personality* (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950). The characteristics included a submissiveness to the authority of the ingroup, a tendency to punish others who violated conventional values, preoccupation with dominance, exaggerated concern with sex and repression of sexual feeling, and rigid thinking. While it may be argued that the leaders of organized hate groups may demonstrate these “authoritarian” characteristics, very little research has been done on the perpetrators of anti-gay/lesbian hate crimes.

Frustration, Scapegoating, and Realistic Group Conflict

Another early psychological explanation of prejudice and aggression comes from the work of

John Dollard and his colleagues at Yale University (Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer, & Sears, 1939). They suggested a theory of *scapegoating* or *displaced aggression*: Frustrated people often direct their anger toward members of another group. Racial prejudice, for example, was seen as related to economic insecurity. Between 1882 and 1930, there were more lynchings of African-Americans in the South in years when cotton prices were low (Hovland & Sears, 1940).

Related to the frustration-aggression theory, is Muzafer Sherif's (1966) *realistic conflict theory* (RCT). The realistic group conflict theory can be seen in Levin and McDevitt's (1993) description of zero-sum thinking. "They view two or more individuals or groups as striving for the same scarce goals, with the success of one automatically implying a reduced probability that others will attain their goals...Zero-sum thinking engages the individual in a competitive struggle to upgrade himself and downgrade others" (pp. 54–55), which can set the scene for hate violence. For example, Jeanine Cogan (1996) suggests that marginalized groups, the poor, immigrants, ethnic minorities, and sexual minorities are being scapegoated by society-at-large for the growing disparity between the very rich and the rest of society in the United States. "The victims are blamed for the offender's personal or economic plight" (Spillane, 1994, p. 245).

Social Identity Theory and Ingroup Bias

According to *social identity theory* (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), people have both an individual and a social identity. Seeing one's group as superior increases personal self-esteem. People have a tendency to enhance their self-esteem by evaluating more favorably the groups to which they belong (ingroups) compared to other groups (outgroups). Simply being placed in a group can create ingroup bias. Michael Billig and Henri Tajfel (1973) found that even if the us-them categorization is based on trivial issues, such as the toss of a coin, people still favor their own group.

Ingroup bias means favoring one's own group, but it can also, although not always, mean devaluing the other. A sense of belonging and comradeship increases when there is a common enemy. Studies have shown that those ingroup members who have an experience which lowers their self esteem, are more likely to highly rate the ingroup and denigrate the outgroup (Cialdini & Richardson, 1980). Bias against the outgroup is also more common if there are social supports for degrading the outgroup. In the United States there are social, religious, political, and legal supports for prejudice against gay men and lesbian women.

Karl Hamner (1992) suggests that the tendency to devalue the other is particularly true of specific members of an ingroup who have low ingroup status. "This may help to explain the young age of man gay-bashers... young people often have not yet had sufficient chance to achieve their own status. Consequently, they turn to group identification and social comparison to boost their self esteem" (p. 185). Joseph Harry (1992) suggests that "gay-bashing offers a nearly ideal solution to the status needs of the immature male...It provides immediate status rewards in the eyes of one's peers because, unlike verbal reports of sexual conquest, it provides direct and corroborated evidence of one's virility" (p. 115).

Theories about Anti-Gay/Lesbian Attitude Formation

Much of the psychological research specifically focused on anti-gay/lesbian violence has been on attitude formation. The majority of people in the United States see gay men and lesbian women as sick, immoral, or criminal (Davis & Smith, 1984). In a study that distinguished between attitudes toward lesbian women and gay men, Herek (1988) reported that 68 percent of respondents agreed with the statement that "sex between two men is just plain wrong" and 64 percent said that they agreed with the statement that "sex between two women is just plain wrong." Over two-

thirds (69.9 percent) agreed with the statement “I think male homosexuals are disgusting,” and 59.9 percent agreed with the statement “I think lesbians are disgusting.” Attitudes toward gay men and lesbian women have changed over time. According to a 1997 Gallup Poll, 84 percent of the population believe that homosexuals should have equal job opportunities, but 59 percent believe that homosexual behavior is morally wrong (Berke, August 2, 1998).

Early psychological research on anti-gay/lesbian bias studied the correlations between negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbian women and other personal characteristics. Mary Kite (1984) offers a nice summary of these early studies.

(P)eople who hold negative attitudes toward homosexuals are likely to support the maintenance of traditional sex roles..., are more likely to stereotype the sexes than those who hold positive attitudes..., and favor preserving the double standard between men and women... (are) less likely to know a homosexual...may be status conscious, authoritarian, and sexually rigid....(Others) reported a strong positive correlation between attitudes toward women and attitudes toward homosexual and reported that negative attitudes toward homosexuals are positively correlated with negative attitudes toward blacks. (pp. 69–70)

Other studies showed that men exhibit significantly more negative attitudes toward homosexuals than do women (Nyberg & Alston, 1976–1977). Men are more negative toward gay men than they are toward lesbian women, whereas women are no more negative toward lesbian women than they are toward gay men. (Kite & Whitley, 1998)

Herek (1984) has defined three functions of attitudes towards homosexuals: ego defensive,

experiential, and symbolic. The function of *ego defensive attitudes* can be seen in the use of the term “homophobia.” It is commonly believed that those who hold negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbian women do so because they feel personally threatened by their own unconscious conflicts about either sexual orientation or gender identity. From a psychodynamic perspective, prejudiced attitudes toward gay men and lesbian women serve to decrease tension aroused by these unconscious conflicts. Franklin (1998) found that many of the perpetrators in her study reported assaulting gay men and lesbian women “to prove their masculine identity by displaying toughness and an endorsement of heterosexuality” (p. 4).

Experiential attitudes are based on past interactions with known homosexuals. “Experiential attitudes develop when affects and cognitions associated with specific interpersonal interactions are generalized to all lesbians and gay men” (Herek, 1984, p. 8). Herek notes that most people develop their beliefs about gay men and lesbian women from stereotypes and ignorance without any contact with gay men and lesbian women. Franklin found that the largest number of assailants in her study claimed that they were reacting to perceived advances by a person. “Assailants interpret their victims’ words and actions based on their belief that homosexuals are sexual predators....once someone is labeled as homosexual, any glance or conversation by that person is perceived as sexual flirtation. Flirtation, in turn, is viewed as a legitimate reason to assault” (1998, p. 3).

Symbolic attitudes are ways of expressing abstract ideological concepts that are closely linked to one’s notion of self and to one’s social network and reference groups. Symbolic attitudes are developed through socialization. “(E)xpressing their attitudes reinforces their self-conceptions publicly, identifies them with important reference groups, and probably elicits ac-

ceptance or avoids rejection from significant others” (Herek, 1984, p. 12). This is similar to Franklin’s finding that many of the perpetrators she studied reported assaulting gay men and lesbian women because of “ideology,” viewing themselves “as social norm enforcers who are punishing moral transgressions” (1998, p. 3).

A POLITICAL EXPLANATION OF ANTI-GAY/LESBIAN VIOLENCE

Anti-gay/lesbian violence is complicated and multi-faceted with numerous, interacting causes. Psychological theories provide useful ways of understanding anti-gay/lesbian violence from an intrapsychic and interpersonal perspective. However, psychological explanations are not sufficient. *A political analysis* of violence against lesbian women, gay men, and other sexual minorities considers power dynamics and social institutions rather than just individual attitudes and behaviors.

A feminist perspective understands violence against lesbian women and gay men in terms of gender politics. Gay men and lesbian women (as well as other sexual minorities, most notably transgendered men and women) are seen as gender outlaws who threaten male patriarchal hegemony. In a very clear and articulate argument, Suzanne Pharr (1988) says that homophobia is “*a weapon of sexism.*” Heterosexism and homophobia serve misogyny and sexism. Heterosexist attitudes and institutions keep women in subordinate relation to men, preserving male dominance and female dependence. Heterosexism maintains the view that women need men to function properly, to be fulfilled and secure. Women bonding together in any way that threatens male dominance and control—political, economic, or sexual—are at serious risk of retaliation. Homophobia is the ultimate weapon against women’s empowerment.

Pharr argues that gay men are also perceived as a threat to male dominance by “breaking rank with male heterosexual solidarity” and “causing a damaging rent in the very fabric of sexism,” as they are “betrayers,” “traitors...who must be punished and eliminated” (1988, p. 18). Gay men threaten white male supremacy because they challenge what it means “to be a man.” This idea is supported by the fact that “gay men who described themselves as ‘a little feminine’ or ‘very feminine’ were twice as likely as other gays to experience gay bashing” (Harry, 1992, p. 119).

Children learn the penalties of being *gender non-conforming* at a young age. They are harassed at school and in the playground. The link between gender non-conformity and anti-gay and lesbian violence is quite apparent. “Anti-gay slurs target non-aggressive boys, tomboyish girls, children with lesbian or gay parents, and even children who befriend these youngsters. Surveys of school children indicate that anti-gay slurs are the most dreaded form of harassment” (Franklin, 1998, p. 6).

Barbara Perry (1998) has studied *hate groups* and ideologies of power in the United States. She maintains that hate groups are based on preserving “the hegemony of white, heterosexual, Christian, male power” (p. 32). “The conclusion that hate activists reach is that it is not minorities who are oppressed and persecuted, but the shrinking white majority” (p. 47). Gay men and lesbian women are seen as threatening the continued survival of the white race because it is assumed that they recruit youth, do not reproduce, and spread AIDS. “Those who recruit for homosexual sodomy are a factor pushing us ever closer to the edge of racial suicide” (Strom, online cited in Perry, 1998, p. 25). “White race faces certain extinction in the near future, unless we identify and destroy our executioners” (Northern Thunder cited in Perry, 1998, p. 47).

Only a small percentage of anti-gay/lesbian violence is committed by members of hate groups (Garofalo, 1997). But, incendiary hate group rhetoric, combined with cultural heterosexism, create the context in which individual acts of violence against gay men and lesbian women occur; a cultural context in which people can “justify” or “downplay” the violent acts they commit. Many people who would find racist and sexist jokes offensive have no trouble with anti-gay/lesbian humor. Our legal system has said that we must protect the “civil rights” of racial, ethnic, religious, and gender minorities but that gay men and lesbian women do not need “special privileges.” Schools recognize the need to “teach tolerance” but find anti-bias curricula controversial because it is assumed that any conversation about gay and lesbian issues—even anti-bias work—would talk about and thus promote sex.

A feminist analysis of anti-gay and lesbian violence means looking at all forms of *oppression*, those based on class, race, ethnicity, age, gender, disability, religion, as well as sexual orientation. While gay men, lesbian women, and other minorities do not threaten the survival of white men, they are in fact a threat to white, able-bodied, heterosexual, patriarchal rule—a threat to patriarchy, not men.

RESPONSES TO ANTI-GAY/LESBIAN VIOLENCE

Legal Responses

One of the first responses to anti-gay/lesbian violence has been what Valerie Jenness and Ryken Grattet (1996) refer to as “the criminalization of hate.” There are currently two federal *hate crime laws*, and numerous state hate crime statutes.

The Hate Crimes Statistics Act (P.L. 101-275), which became law in 1990, requires the U.S.

Department of Justice to maintain statistics on hate crimes. However, it doesn't require local or state agencies to report the statistics to the FBI, nor does it provide any funds to local police agencies or the FBI to help with this task. The second federal law, The Hate Crimes Sentencing Enhancement Act, (P.L. 103-322), requires that the U.S. Sentencing Commission provide sentencing enhancements for crimes that are determined beyond a reasonable doubt to be hate crimes. This only applies to hate crimes committed on federal property, but many states have sentencing enhancement acts. Congress is currently considering the Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 1998 (S.1529/H.R. 3081) which would amend current federal criminal civil rights laws to provide authority for federal officials to investigate and prosecute cases in which the violence occurs because of a victim's gender, sexual orientation, or disability. However this law is also provoking much controversy.

There has been a struggle to include sexual orientation in hate crimes legislation on both the federal and state level. Forty-one states have hate crimes statutes; however, only 19 states and the District of Columbia include sexual orientation. This is significant given the fact that the largest number of prosecutions for hate crimes occurs at the state level (Spillane, 1994).

There are a number of problems with current hate crimes legislation. It is often difficult to tell what is and what isn't a hate crime (Berk, Boyd, & Hamner, 1992; Gerstenfeld, 1992). Not all jurisdictions are required to report hate crimes. Many gay men and lesbian women fear secondary victimization if they disclose their sexual orientation (Berrill & Herek, 1992). Enhancement laws may in fact increase hostility (Gerstenfeld, 1992). Finally, calling anti-gay harassment a hate crime puts it into the jurisdiction of the criminal justice system, "which may not be well prepared to deal with deep-seated intergroup animosities" (Garofalo, 1997, p. 142)

However, hate crime legislation does send a symbolic message. “The laws then serve a *symbolic* purpose, and the punishment of offenders acts as a denunciation of their evil acts... The primary difference between symbolism and denunciation is that symbolism focuses on the law itself, whereas denunciation focuses on the punishment for violating the law” (Gerstenfeld, 1992, p. 267).

Social Responses

Levin and McDevitt assert there is “a growing *culture of hate*; from humor and music to religion and politics, a person’s group affiliation—the fact that he or she *differs from people in the in-group*—is being used more and more to provide a basis for dehumanizing and insulting the person” (1993, p. 34). Rather than helping counteract the growing culture of hate, the media contributes to its spread. Eliminating portrayals of others that are racist, sexist, ableist, ageist, and heterosexist would be an important step toward reducing hate crimes in U.S. society.

The *contact hypothesis* suggests contact between members of hostile groups will reduce intergroup hostility. Allport (1979) notes that intergroup contact decreases hostility between groups when it meets four necessary conditions: “Prejudice (unless deeply rooted in the character structure of the individual) may be reduced by equal status contact between majority and minority groups in the pursuit of common goals. The effect is greatly enhanced if this contact is sanctioned by institutional supports (i.e., by law, custom or local atmosphere), and provided it is of a sort that leads to the perception of common interests and common humanity between members of the two groups” (p. 231).

Numerous studies have shown that heterosexuals who have more contact with lesbian women

and gay men have more positive attitudes toward them than those who believe they have not had contact or do not know lesbian women or gay men (Herek & Capitanio, 1996). Gay men and lesbian women can be encouraged to come out to others, breaking stereotypes, and fighting the forces that would keep them hidden and invisible. (See Niens and Cairns in this volume for a further elaboration of contact theory.)

Educational Responses

It is possible to change social norms through educational campaigns. Schools can combat the dominant cultural norm that says that it is okay to harass someone for being different. Franklin suggests a “(p)roactive intervention against school based harassment and violence. *Anti-bias curricula* must be introduced as early as kindergarten and must continue through high school” (1998, p. 8). Anti-bias curricula help teachers learn how to recognize such violence and intervene to eliminate it. Children are taught how to work collaboratively, how to have empathy for others, and how to handle feelings of frustration and anger.

Many teenage perpetrators of anti-gay/lesbian violence are thrill seekers who commit crimes because of frustration and boredom (Levin & McDevitt, 1993; Franklin, 1998). Afterschool programs and activities that provide activities and challenges for adolescents may help decrease all forms of crimes by giving adolescents the chance to develop new skills and feel a sense of opportunity and hopefulness.

Combating Interlocking Systems of Oppression through Coalition Building

Valerie Jenness and Kendal Broad (1994) note that, “Unlike feminist activism around violence against women...activism around anti-gay and lesbian violence has ignored patriarchy and the

gender relations that sustain and reflect it” (p. 419). They cite the work of Carole Sheffield who notes that the “linkage between race-hate, gay-hate, and misogyny is evident” (1987, p. 89), and point out that gay and lesbian anti-violence activism rarely recognizes the centrality of race and gender.

Anti-lesbian/gay violence must be understood within the context of *interlocking systems of oppression*. Structural violence against racial and ethnic minorities and the poor creates an environment ripe for all kinds of frustration and aggression. The widening gap between the rich and poor in the United States and the sense of despair that it engenders create a context in which violence becomes endemic. A more equitable society in which individuals do not feel that they are competing with others for a smaller piece of the pie will help to decrease frustration and aggression.

CONCLUSION

As the United States enters the twenty-first century, hate crimes and violence against racial, ethnic, religious, and sexual minorities are on the rise. Anti-gay/lesbian violence is similar to violence against other minority groups but differs in some important ways. Anti-gay/lesbian violence is more socially sanctioned. The structural violence of sodomy laws and other discriminatory laws creates a context that supports the dehumanization and demonizing of gay men and lesbian women. Lesbian women and gay men are more likely than other minority group members to experience physical assaults and attacks that are particularly vicious. Anti-gay/lesbian violence seems to be rooted more in gender politics than difference politics, although racial politics have an effect.

While a psychological perspective offers us some understanding of what contributes to individual attitudes and behaviors, we must not ignore the political nature of anti-lesbian/gay violence and all hate crimes. If the twenty-first century is to see a reduction in hate crimes and violence, then it is essential that people (1) attend to structural violence and the social and power dynamics of the patriarchal system in which such violence occurs; (2) recognize that much of what is considered anti-gay/lesbian violence is in fact based on gender politics; (3) acknowledge and affirm the incredible diversity in the lesbian and gay communities in terms of race, ethnicity, age, class, education, disability, and political ideology; (4) use our psychological knowledge to construct interventions to prevent all forms of violence; and, (5) work in coalitions with other oppressed groups using our strengths and training in human behavior and systems theories to create radical social change.