SEXUAL PREJUDICE AND STIGMA OF LGBT PEOPLE

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Abstract

Sexual prejudice is internalized sexual stigma that results in the negative evaluation of sexual minorities. 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 (Albarracin, Zanna, Johnson, & Kumkale, 2005; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993).

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, 1980), patterns of antigay behavior are likely to be correlated with sexual prejudice, but only moderately so.

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. 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.

This article aims to give an overview of stigma, sexual prejudice and social exclusion as terms linked strongly to each-other, and the impact they have on society, especially to a traditional society as Albanian one is.

Keywords: Sexual prejudice, sexism, stigma, social exclusion

Introduction

Homosexuality has been an issue since the time history can recall. Attitude towards homosexuality has been various in accordance to type of societies, cultural and moral development or political situation. The level of homophobia in the population of Albanian students is high. More than 80%

of them claim that they would be very worried if it turned out that one of their family members or friend is homosexual. They and most of Albanians in general think that homosexuality is an indicator of someone's moral degradation.

Stereotypes, as a special kind of cognitive schemes are developed through the social inheritance, which means that they are passed on through the socialization as prepared trait's collections, which are connected with particular category of people. The point of stereotype's acquisition is that the information about stigmatized group is accompanied by negative affect passed on in a nonverbal way. The child very quickly associates the category of "gay" or "lesbian" with the atmosphere of outrage and disgust, and consequently learns how to react to this category with the same emotions as parents do.

The lack of acceptance toward homosexuals is often just an expression of dislike to minority groups, to anyone who is different or to any opinion that is dissimilar. This feature is characteristic for primitive mentality, regardless whether the person who expresses this feature is an illiterate or is graduated from university.

The acceptance of homosexuality has improved today, however, heterosexuality is still viewed as the normative, and homosexuality as the deviant sexual orientation.

Stigma refers to an enduring condition or attribute, a physical or figurative mark borne by an individual; the attribute or mark is not inherently meaningful; meanings are attached to it through social interaction. The meaning attached to the mark by the larger group or society involves a negative valuation. The attribute is understood by all to signify that its bearer is a criminal, villain, or otherwise deserving of social ostracism, infamy, shame, and condemnation. Thus, the stigmatized are not simply different from others; society judges their deviation to be discrediting. Individual members of society may vary in how they personally respond to a particular stigma, but everyone shares the knowledge that the mark is negatively valued.

Regardless of their personal attitudes, members of Albanian society share the knowledge that homosexual acts and desires, as well as identities based on them, are widely considered bad, immature, sick, and inferior to heterosexuality. This paper aims to have an overview of the sexual stigma, focusing on the social exclusion as a result of sexual stigma, its factors and classification.

Definition of sexual stigma

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). 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, Goffman used stigma to refer to "an undesired differentness" and "an attribute that is deeply discrediting".

Other writers have similarly emphasized that stigma is very much about the socially constructed meanings associated with a characteristic (Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998). Moreover, the meanings are grounded in society's power relations (Link & Phelan, 2001). Iindividuals 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, stigma is used 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. 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 the stigma attached to any non heterosexual behavior, identity, relationship, or community. It is socially shared knowledge about homosexuality's devalued status relative to heterosexuality. 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. 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.

Social exclusion, a consequence of stigma?

In order to promote the advancement of social inclusion policy, it is important to be clear about the problem that it seeks to address, namely social exclusion. There is no single meaning or definition of social exclusion from academics or politicians, but what it is known more and more is the fact that this concept broader is just "poor". In a book published by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 2003, Jordi Estivill explains that "social exclusion can be understood as a collection of processes that joins successive elements that come from the heart of economics, politics and society, gradually distances and places, people, groups, communities and territories in a position of inferiority in relation to prevailing values "(Estivill 2003).

The European Commission and the European Council have determined the social exclusion in this way: "Social exclusion means not just insufficient income, but it even goes beyond, the participation in working

life, is clear in areas such as housing, education, health and access to services." European Commission, COM (1993). This process, in which certain individuals are pushed to the fringes of society and prevented from participation in various processes based on their sexual orientation, as a result of discrimination, denies them the possibility for a workplace, training opportunities, social networks and community activities. (European Council 2004)

People can be socially excluded for a variety of reasons, as a result they experience various forms of social exclusion. Social exclusion for LGBT people is not the same thing as what brings social exclusion for someone who is unemployed or homeless for example. One of the main features of social exclusion of LGBT people is their invisibility and marginalization, or in more political terms, the lack of recognition of LGBT people as full members of a community and as citizens (Gross 1991).

Recognizing that the term stigma historically has referred a sign or a mark, as mentioned above, it is designed to expose something unusual and bad about the moral status of the person who carries it. Relying on the fact that they are "marked" (feature or membership in a group), an individual is considered by society as divergent in a way disadvantaged by its understanding of normality.

Individuals residing stigmatized, LGBT, enjoy less access to valuable resources, less impact on others, and less control over their destiny. Consequently, it is difficult to track their hiring process. Despite their personal attitudes, members of society are of the view that homosexual acts and desires, and identities based on them, are widely considered bad, immature, ill, and inferior to heterosexuality. This opinion divided between them, is stigma, a term whose use dates back to at least the first time in the 1300s in England. In psychological terminology stigma refers to a stable condition or attribute, a physical or figurative mark the birth of an individual. The meaning attached by the largest group of society is that stigma includes a negative rating. This "attribute" is understood by all to determine its bearer is a criminal, or otherwise worthy social isolation, shame and punishment. Thus, people under stigma are not just different from others; society deems that their deviation should be discredited. LGBT individuals, as every member of society can differ in how they personally respond to a particular stigma, but all are of the opinion that this mark is evaluated negatively (Goffman 1963).

Another feature of stigma is that it "swallows" the whole identity of the person who has it. Stigma does not bring social disapproval simply an aspect of an individual, as may be the case for a custom / annoying habit or a small personality flaw. Rather, it deletes all the other features and qualities. Since the moment they become aware of the stigmatized status of a person,

they respond primarily individual in his direction. Finally, the roles of the stigmatized and "normal" are not merely complementary or symmetrical. They are differentiated from power. Stigmatized groups have less power and access to resources than those considered "normal".

Many authors have used the concept of sexual stigma (Plummer, 1975) and erotic stigma (Rubin, 1984) as the label for the stigma attached to male homosexuality and a range of sexual behaviors that society allocates low status, including immoral, commercial and the public sex.

The ultimate consequence of sexual stigma is a power difference between heterosexuals and homosexuals (Sanday, 1990). It expresses and perpetuates a set of hierarchical relations within society. In the hierarchy of power, homosexuality is devalued and considered inferior to heterosexuality. This makes the job of LGBT persons in case of their sexual orientation to be expressed openly, virtually impossible as well as their treatment at work to be discriminatory. Gay men, their relationships and their communities are all the sick, immoral, or less optimal in comparison with what is heterosexual, especially in a subdued society as Albanian.

Factors of sexual stigma

The extent to which sexual stigma leads to acts of discriminatory behavior also depends on other factors. If participants in an interaction are themselves gay or if they personally refuse sexual stigma of society, being gay or having homosexual desires or experiences such, there are reasons for rejection, isolation, or helplessness in certain situations, namely employment or labor relations.

Even if homosexuality, framed or not in terms of desires, actions and identities, it does not always serve as a basis for insulation, however, remains stigmatized Albanian contemporary society. Preliminary answer to this is disapproval, disgust, or discriminatory behavior. Recognizing this fact, gay people routinely reach the degree to which others have access to information about their sexual status of "minority". Based on their feelings, heterosexual people do not make any conscious effort to communicate their lack of prejudice, but sexual stigma is a fundamental assumption in most social interactions.

Unlike sexual stigma implies that the antipathy of society towards those who are not heterosexual, heterosexism is a term used often closely associated with stigma, and used to refer to systems that provide logical and operational guidelines for antipathy. These systems include beliefs about sex, morality and the risk to which homosexuality and sexual minorities are defined as deviant, sinful and threatening. Hostility, discrimination and violence are justified in this way as appropriate and even considered necessary. Heterosexism predicts that sexual stigma appears in different

ways, especially through invisibility and violence and sexual minorities, when they become visible through the open hostility.

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 (Herek, 2004). 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, violent victimization was long considered the inevitable price that homosexual people paid when they became visible to heterosexuals. 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). Sexual minority victims of hate crimes have elevated levels of psychological distress.

Cultural factors on the other hand increase sexual stigma and it is very clear in Albanian society, which is extremely conservative and patriarchal, and what we need is a real cultural change.

Heterosexism

Heterosexism, closely related to stigma as a term, is used to draw connections between a belief system that degrades people based on their sexual orientation and other belief systems that make similar distinctions based on race or sex, in other words, racism and sexism. Heterosexism was used in the 1970s and 1980s, linked to anti-gay ideology. It was considered to be natural at any patriarchal society. Thus, its elimination requires a radical restructuring of the culture of gender roles and power relations (Kitzinger, 1987, Rich, 1980). Homophobia stems from how society constructs gender. However, theoretical orientations concepts are seen more as psychological, focusing on homophobia as a kind of attitude towards others (or gay, straight). If sexual stigma refers to common knowledge that homosexuality is denigrated, heterosexism refers to cultural ideology that promotes this antipathy.

The stigma on homosexuality exists in many parts of the world and the discrimination, harassment and criminalization of homosexual acts threaten the rights of LGBT people. In addition, interference in the private lives of LGBT people is a common occurrence. "Homophobia" has had the effect of removing these people from society on the basis of their sexual orientation, increasing the likelihood of discrimination or "hate crimes". Lack of adequate legal protection and support from state institutions to prevent discrimination and violence against people based on their sexual orientation is therefore another issue that has to do with the protection afforded under international human rights.

Classification of sexual stigma
Felt Stigma

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. 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. 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.

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.

Self-Stigma

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).

Self-stigma has often been assumed to be virtually universal among sexual minorities, owing to the pervasiveness of sexual stigma. Sexual self-stigma which has also been labeled *internalized heterosexism* (Szymanski & Chung, 2003) and *internalized homo-negativity* (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).

Conclusion and recommendation

Sexual prejudice, like other attitudes, is internal, inside a person's head. It cannot be directly observed.

Sexual prejudice must be inferred from overt behavior. It can also be inferred from a heterosexual's nonverbal behavior in the presence of a gay man or lesbian and from actions.

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.

Regardless of the extent to which social and biology influences one's sexual identity, lesbians, gays, and bisexuals should be afforded protection against discrimination arising from their sexual orientation.

Homophobia and discrimination exist, and only social and political remedies will counter discrimination, especially in Albanian society.

Lack of adequate legal protection and support from state institutions to prevent discrimination and violence against people based on their sexual orientation is therefore another issue that has to do with the protection afforded under international human rights.

It is also important to consider how events in society affect sexual prejudice.

Societal changes in Albania have created some conditions that fostered a diminution of sexual prejudice in recent decades, with the trend toward greater tolerance and less hostility accelerating in the early 1990s.

Cultural shifts in stigma have facilitated individual attitude change, including reduced sexual prejudice among elites and opinion leaders

Unfortunately, there should be done more and what we recommend is expressing antigay prejudice in Albania, which has come to play a central role in the identities of many religious conservatives worldwide whereas tolerance for sexual minorities has become part of the identities of many liberals, libertarians, and feminists.

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