Gender Roles and Marginalization

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Over the last several decades, homosexuality and homosexuals have become increasingly visible in the United States. With this visibility has come political controversy as people gay and straight alike confront the homophobia that has been embedded in the United States’ social structure both formally (i.e., institutional and legal discrimination) and informally (i.e., harassment, hate crimes). Although social conditions have changed in many ways for gay men and women, stigmatization of homosexuality endures. Research suggests that being a member of a stigmatized sexual minority group affects mental health, self-concepts, and behaviors.

Throughout the paper, take note of how the writing is very sterile and objective. Description, especially narrative description, is not used, and the writing instead focuses on reporting “cold, hard” information. There should also be an absence of judgment or argumentative statements. All references to situations or phenomena being “bad” or “good,” “positive” or “negative,” should be omitted. Literature reviews are objective reports of the material, and do not argue a point.

Social scientists are concerned with the effects homophobia may have on the mental health and self-perceptions of gay men. Throughout the paper, check out the topic sentences. They more often than not address a specific relationship between two or more variables or themes, and consistently reinforce these relationships throughout by presenting research that shows those relationships. Homophobia is defined as “a fear and dislike of lesbians and gay men” (Clinard and Meier 2001:484). Although homophobia originally referred to only the fear of same-sex orientation, it has been expanded to include antigay prejudice and discrimination (Thio 2007). The term can be divided into two social dimensions: homophobic attitudes and homophobic behavior. Homophobic attitudes refer to prejudice against homosexuals, and such
prejudice can serve as motivation for homophobic behavior or discrimination – outward expression of homophobic attitudes. Homophobia has been regarded as a social phenomenon that creates and sustains stigmas and stereotypes about homosexuals (Clinard and Meier 2001).

Many studies have found that homophobia and gay stigma can lower mental health in gay men (Balsam, Beauchaine, Mickey, and Rothblum 2005; Diaz, Ayala, Bein, Henne, and Marian 2001; Frable, Wortman, and Joseph 1997). According to Balsam et al. (2005), homosexuals are more likely to seek mental health services, including psychotherapy and psychiatric aid, than heterosexuals. In addition, Lewis, Derlega, Griffin, and Krowinski (2003) report that unique, gay-related stressors (e.g., pressures of being part of a sexual minority) contribute to depression in gays and lesbians.

Stigmatization can have negative effects on the self-esteem and self-concept of gay men (Frable, Platt, and Hoey 1998). Membership in a devalued social group can lead to lower self-esteem and increased emotional distress that result in psychological maladjustment and a distorted personal identity (Katz, Joiner, and Kwon 2002). These findings have prompted social scientists to conduct further research on understanding how gay men develop their identities, especially in light of the homophobia in society. In this study, the researcher examines the effects of homophobia on the self-perceptions of gay men.

As the research on gay men and their psychological well-being has grown, common themes regarding homophobia and its effect on gay men have emerged. Researchers use an array of themes to represent the unique social conditions and stressors that arise from homophobia, as well as to explain how such social conditions affect gay men psychologically and socially. In this study, the researcher examines two sources of homophobia: stigmatization and masculinity norms. Both themes can be used to analyze the psychological and social consequences of
homophobia.

STIGMATIZATION

Stigmatization has a profound impact on the self-perceptions of gay men. Stigma refers to rejection based on membership in a particular group, and it is reinforced through social interactions and institutions (Frable, Platt, and Hoey 1998). According to Katz et al. (2002), being a devalued sexual minority group can strongly affect the way gay men feel about themselves and their group. Being devalued by the dominant society can induce feelings of inferiority in minority group members.

Growing up in a heterosexist society promotes gay stigma in that dominant norms neglect and stigmatize homosexuals as a minority group. Most gays learn the stigma attached to homosexuality early in life, since they are often raised by heterosexual parents who assume their child is also heterosexual (Frable, Wortman, and Joseph 1997). For example, Hillier and Harrison (2004) reported that many young people described their parents as seeing homosexuality as an illness that needed to be treated and cured. Because of such heterosexism, gay men often lack knowledge about their social group outside of the stigma attached to that group (Frable et al. 1997; Frable et al. 1998). Social development in a heteronormative environment can lead gay men to retain stigmatized attitudes towards themselves and their own group (Galatzer-Levy and Cohler 2002). In addition, minority groups may experience psychological frustration when their group is not reflected in the norms and social structures of the dominant culture (Meyer 2003). These negative attitudes towards homosexuality can result in lower self-esteem and higher psychological distress in gay men. Notice in this paragraph that multiple sources are used to support one point. This is ideally what a writer wants to do in a literature review – synthesize the information and show how the multiple sources relate to a
particular point presented for the paper. Notice, too, how the discussions of each source are concise and limited to their relevance to establishing a relationship between two (or more) variables – in this case, they all center around conceptualizing the relationship between stigma and self-perception.

The nature of a stigma is important to consider in assessing its effects on individuals. Frankham (2001) conducted a study on how young gay men come to identify themselves as “different.” Participant responses reflected the stigma that gay men are sex-driven and abnormal, especially compared to heterosexuals. These beliefs give rise to a hierarchy that establishes homosexuals as inferior to heterosexuals. As a result, people only learn the stereotyped differences between heterosexuals and homosexuals, with the latter being abnormal and freakish. These stigmatized images can lead to distorted self-images in gay men. Gay men’s perceptions of themselves as abnormal and inferior to heterosexuals can undermine their self-worth.

MASCULINITY NORMS

Social scientists have studied how the American standards of masculinity affect the self-perceptions of gay men. Note that here, a new variable is introduced, and the focus of the research presented hereafter is still focus on the relationship between the new variable, masculinity norms, and self-perception. Prior research has shown that although gay men consistently identify with more feminine or androgynous identities, they still recognize the need to adhere to traditional gender norms (Hooberman 1979; Hellwege, Perry, and Dobson 1988). This creates an unhealthy dissonance between gay men’s identities and the norms they choose to follow.

Moulton and Adams-Price (1997) measured attitudes of gay and straight males towards cross-dressing and gender discordant behavior. Results showed that the social construction…