

## Gay Psychologist Creates New Terms for Use in the Social Debate

### *“Sexual Prejudice” and “Heterosexism” to Replace Older Term, “Homophobia”*

University of California Davis Professor Gregory M. Herek, Ph.D., published “Beyond ‘Homophobia’: Thinking About Sexual Prejudice and Stigma in the Twenty-First Century,” in the April, 2004, issue of *Sexuality Research & Social Policy*.

Dr. Herek also hosts a web site called “Sexual Orientation: Science, Education, and Policy,” which includes a section titled “Attempts to Change Sexual Orientation.”

In his paper on homophobia, stigma, and sexual prejudice, Dr. Herek suggests that although the term “homophobia” was useful in pushing forward the gay agenda in our culture, the term may be too limited in its scope today.

Herek describes in detail how the term homophobia was invented in 1965 by Dr. George Weinberg and later popularized in his writings in the 1970s. According to Herek, Weinberg helped mainstream the idea of homophobia with the help of two gay activists, Jack Nichols and Lige Clarke. They first used the term in the pornography magazine *Screw*, edited by Al Goldstein. In their article, the authors used the term homophobia to describe heterosexual fears that others might think they were homosexual. The authors postulated that “homophobic” fears limited the experiences of heterosexual males from involvement in poetry, art, movement, and same-sex touching.

Herek, notes, however, that homophobia is too closely linked

with concepts of fear or psychopathology. He suggests that psychiatrists and psychologists adopt three new terms to describe hostility toward homosexuality: “sexual prejudice,” “sexual stigma,” and “heterosexism.”

Like the term “sexual minority,” “sexual prejudice” implies that anyone who believes heterosexuality to be the norm is bigoted in the same way that a racist is bigoted.

He describes sexual prejudice as “negative attitudes based on sexual orientation, whether their target is homosexual, bisexual, or heterosexual. Thus, it can be used to characterize not only antigay and anti-bisexual hostility, but also the negative attitudes that some member of sexual minorities hold toward heterosexuals.”

Sexual stigma is defined as “the shared knowledge of society’s negative regard for any nonheterosexual behavior, identity, relationship, or community. The ultimate consequence of sexual stigma is a power differential between heterosexuals and nonheterosexuals.”

Herek defines heterosexism as “the systems that provide the rational and operating instructions for that antipathy [against gays]. These systems include beliefs about gender, morality, and danger by which homosexuality and sexual minorities are defined as deviant, sinful, and threatening. Hostility, discrimination, and violence are thereby justified as appropriate and even necessary.”