

The Constructions of Attitudes about Homosexuality based on Contacts with Gays and Lesbians

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Abstract

Main aim of this paper is to understand how discourse about homosexuality is premised upon the ways that people talk about homosexuality based in their personal contact with gays and lesbians. Evidences of this study suggest that people's affective attitudes and moral values regarding homosexuality are related to personal contact with gays and lesbians as the most important predictors of attitudes. The set of data analyzed in this paper is comprised of 10 in-depth interviews with participants with various demographic characteristics. Qualitative analysis of the individual interviews shows how people discursively construct opinions about homosexuality based in a specific conversational context, by drawing on elements of their cultural repertoires, such as life experiences relating to contacts with gays and lesbians.

First, I explain that people's understandings of homosexuality are of fundamental importance in shaping how they talk about it. Second, I analyze that people's understandings of homosexuality are composed of a variety of life experiences with gays and lesbians, which are themselves complex and not necessarily ideologically correlated. Of particular importance is a person's tacit definition of homosexuality. It is shaped by a person's cohort and religious ideologies, but it is also shaped by the extent of their contact with and acceptance of the cultural construction of homosexuality that is dominant during a given period. Finally, I interpret how the nature of a persons' contact with gays and lesbians, their exposure to gays and lesbians and the composition of their social networks complicates the analysis of social generational change with the homosexuality discourse.

Keywords: *Gay and lesbians, Homosexuality, Attitudes, Religion, Empathy.*

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