

# It's Time to Bury the Word "Homophobia"

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By Don Kilhefner

With the blood from the massacre in Orlando barely dry, let me strongly state that the word "homophobia" is wimpy, a misnomer, and needs to be retired. When it was introduced in 1969, the new word had a modicum of relevance. It quickly became the word to explain gay oppression, but no longer. Gay people are more awake now.

The word "phobia," meaning "fear," belongs to the lexicon of clinical psychology, not sociopolitical discourse regarding social privilege and societal change. The word "homophobia" trivializes and obfuscates what is really happening to gay people in the United States and globally now and historically. It says nothing about the source of a system that breeds gay and lesbian genocide.

I suggest "homophobia" be replaced by the words "the ideology of heterosexual supremacy," a mouthful for sure, in all its permutations, "hetero supremacy" for short. Since every ideology is actualized by having actual practices attached to it, let's call the practices "gay hate," "gay behavioral cleansing" and "gay genocide."

Let me ask you this: Was Hitler's "Final Solution" caused by a Jewishphobia or was it based, in part, on an ideology of Aryan supremacy having superior and inferior races, with open hunting season on the inferior ones?

My intention in suggesting a different understanding is not the expectation that overnight name-change will occur. I am not seeking a consensus. As a successfully functioning gay elder, with 50 years of continuous service in the evolution of gay people under my belt, I am neither that narcissistically grandiose nor innocently naive.

My intention in this opinion piece is asking LGBT people at this moment in our history to pull back and take a much larger, global view of the source of our oppression. In the process, we should be able to name and distinguish the forest from the names of the limited individual trees—homophobia, heteronormative, heterosexism, ad infinitum.

The term "homophobia" was first coined by Dr. George Weinberg, a psychologist, in the American porn magazine *Screw* in 1969 and amplified in his "Society and the Healthy Homosexual" in 1972. "Homophobia" describes an internal emotional state—fear of homosexuality. It says absolutely nothing about the dominant, systemic intellectual, religious and cultural superstructure in society that supports and makes possible horrific acts of violence against gay people and their community.

Let me give you a few contemporary examples. You tell me if they are phobias or whether there is a critical necessity for a more intellectually honest, reality-based word.

Today the Catholic church teaches globally that homosexuality is an "objective moral disorder" and all those who practice it will burn in Hell for all eternity. Does this sound like a simple phobia, only requiring Pope Francis to commence cognitive-behavioral therapy to cure? Or does it sound remarkably like the hate language that's a prelude to behavioral cleansing? Is there any difference between the Church's "objective moral disorder" (gays are unnatural and inferior) and ISIS' teaching of fitrah, "natural human disposition" (gays are unnatural and inferior)? Both define "nature" and "natural" exclusively from a position of heterosexual power in heterosexual terms. Both define gay people as in violation of heterosexually derived and defined "laws of nature," unnatural freaks permitting intellectual genocide (the Church) and physical genocide (ISIS) against gay people. It's what John Adams was getting at in 1788 when he first used the phrase "the tyranny of the majority."

These religious ideologies of heterosexual superiority have always had consequences for gay people—gruesome death, like the Orlando Massacre.

The phrase “death by stoning” is accomplished by having a gay man dig a hole in which he is buried up to his shoulders with only his head and shoulders showing. Then rocks and pieces of concrete are forcefully hurled at his head, crushing it.

In Iran and Saudi Arabia the ayatollahs and mullahs approve of gay men involuntarily being forced to undergo sex reassignment surgery. Their medieval binary-reasoning is that if gay men want to have sex with men like women do, we’ll make them women.

There have been reports from Iraq that vigilante groups capture gay men, sew their anus shut and then force-feed them large quantities of laxatives. Writhing in beyond-severe pain, their gastrointestinal tracts explode.

In Libya and other places, militias tie up gay men, take them to the roof of very tall buildings and throw them off. If they are not dead when they hit ground, a group at the bottom stones them to death.

In Uganda newspapers called for the death of all gays and lesbians. As a public service, they even provided names and addresses. At night someone broke into the home of beautiful David Kato, a young man central to Uganda’s fledgling gay liberation movement and referred to as the first openly gay man in Uganda. His brains were beaten out with a hammer as he slept.

In Bangladesh recently, Xulhaz Mannan, the vocal and visible editor of Roopbaan, the only gay magazine there, was hacked to death with a machete by Al Queda fundamentalists.

Is the best descriptor of these acts of heinous savagery the word “homophobia?” Historically, the list of religion-sponsored and state-sponsored genocide against gay people, based on the unexamined assumption of hetero superiority, goes on and on, century after century century, all over the world.

Before Americans get too self-righteous and sanctimonious by pointing their finger at Islam, assault rifles, or whoever or whatever by political opportunists, there is now also a growing, documented history of murder and other violence by heterosexual supremacists against gay people in the United States. It’s tragically laughable that the FBI and other investigators are playing dumb, pretending like they don’t know what caused the Orlando murders.

The only difference between then and now is how many gays can be killed at one time. Before the Stonewall Rebellion, gays in the United States were murdered, beat up, driven to suicide one by one, under the radar of the media, legal justice or anyone really caring. The dominant hetero culture gave gays what they deserved—behavioral cleansing. See a cockroach, call the exterminator. Now with assault rifles many of us can be murdered at one time.

This is not about demonizing heterosexuals, far from it. In 1969, and continuously thereafter, heterosexual allies understood and supported the Gay Liberation revolution long before many homosexuals could even utter the words “gay oppression.”

One simply cannot understand what happened in Orlando or what is happening around the world or what has transpired historically without understanding the theory and practice of hetero supremacy. It’s that simple. Blacks talk about white supremacy; women understand male supremacy. Why do LGBT people avoid the word “heterosexual supremacy?”

Otherwise, all you get are people mouthing tired platitudes, like homophobia, like regarding the cause of the Orlando Massacre.

If we really want to live in a truly pluralistic society, there is no room for cults of supremacy of any kind.

(A shorter version of this essay appeared as an opinion piece in the The Gay and Lesbian Review International (September-October 2016).)



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