

# Homosexuality is an important issue for politicians sociology essay

[Sociology](#)



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\n[[toc title="Table of Contents"](#)]\n

\n \t

1. [2. 0 Introduction](#) \n \t
2. [2. 1 Role Theory](#) \n \t
3. [2. 2 Contact Theory](#) \n \t
4. [2. 3 Heterosexism](#) \n \t
5. [Chapter 3: Homosexuality in Mauritius](#) \n \t
6. [3. 1 The Situation of homosexuals in Mauritius](#) \n \t
7. [3. 2 Gender-Inverted Images of homosexuals in Mauritius](#) \n \t
8. [3. 3 Gender Role Attitudes in Mauritius](#) \n \t
9. [3. 4 Religion in Mauritius](#) \n

\n[/toc]\n \n

## **2. 0 Introduction**

Attitude towards homosexuality is an important issue for politicians, law makers and social scientists. Many studies have depicted an increase in the acceptance of homosexuals in the western countries (Greenberg and Bystryn, 1982; Loftus, 2001). Although many organizations have become more accepting and supportive of homosexuals rights, religions and religious institutions in general have been unsupportive. Youngsters have therefore come of age caught between increasing support for and acceptance of homosexuals from secular authorities and a strong counter-mobilization from the religious right. Youngsters in general constitute an interesting research area, as they show less acceptance and tolerance towards homosexuals than their female counterparts, although the fact that young individuals on the

whole are more tolerant compared to the rest of the population. Youngsters, therefore, seem to be situated at the intersection of two forces: one makes them more tolerant, the other less. In this study, the role theory and contact theory has been used. Role theory explains the reasons why heterosexuals are prejudiced toward gays and lesbians focusing on heterosexuals' belief that homosexuals breach expected social roles. On the other hand, contact theory clarifies positive attitudes towards gays and lesbians developed by heterosexuals' interpersonal contact with homosexuals. To illustrate the power relationship between heterosexuals and homosexuals, the approach of heterosexism from radical feminism theory and the way homosexuals are abused in society are being discussed. Further, role theory and contact theory is being integrated into the concept of heterosexism.

## **2. 1 Role Theory**

" Role theory is a science that study behaviors which are characteristic of individuals within context and within distinct processes that apparently produce, describe, or are influenced by those behaviors" (Biddle, 1979).

Biddle (1979) defined roles as " a behavioral repertoire characteristic of an individual or a position; a set of principles, descriptions, norms, or concepts existed and maintained for the behaviors of an individual or social position; or (less often) a position itself. In other words, individuals are assigned to play specific roles and behave appropriately based on their personal characteristics or the positions they occupy. Some examples of personal characteristics are age, race, and sex. Indefinitely such personal characteristics are generally fixed, compared to certain behavioral characteristics or positions which are regularly more malleable (Biddle,

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1979). This is why; physical characteristics may delineate power relationships. There are certain expectations that are essential for individuals to satisfy their roles. These expectations are shared by many individuals and are learned through socialization. These expectations are learned from parents, family, and colleagues and can be taught by social institutions such as schools and religious institutions (Eagly 1987). Like expectations, reactions are also shared. Individuals who adopt the expected behaviors are expected to be rewarded, while those who violate them are anticipated to be punished. Social behavior expectations lay great emphasis on sex and gender categorizations (Eagly, 1987). He classified gender roles as "those shared expectations (that is those suitable behaviors and qualities) that apply to people on the basis of their socially identified gender." Especially, women are expected to take care of others and to do household chores more than men, while men are considered to be more autocratic and more suitable as breadwinners (Eagly, 1987). Nevertheless, overtime women's roles have changed. Twenge's (1997) investigation found that both women's and men's masculinity scores have speed up since 1973, even though women's scores have altered more rapidly than men's. On the other hand, men's and women's femininity scores have changed fairly. As a result, there is a decreasing pattern on men's and women's masculinity scores. That is, women possess more masculine attitudes and are becoming more androgynous. This implies that women have fewer social constraints in the acquisition of masculine characteristics, whereas men continue to go through strong negative reactions from others if they attain feminine traits (Feinman 1981; Twenge 1997). Kite and Deaux (1987) analyzed the

stereotypes associated with homosexuals. Their study showed that the heterosexuals associated gay men with heterosexual female traits and lesbians with heterosexual male characteristics. For example, lesbians are more of a masculine characteristic such as short hairs, while gay men walk femininely and talk in a high-pitched tone and wear jewelry. Moulton and Adams-Price (1997) carry out an analysis about heterosexual and homosexual men's behavior towards heterosexual cross-dressers, homosexual cross-dressers and homosexual non-cross-dresses. Heterosexual men did not differentiate the degree of masculinity between the three groups and expressed negative attitudes towards them. These results illustrate that heterosexual men point gay men as feminine, much like cross-dressers. Further, gay men are considered to be violating traditional male sex roles instead of expressing traditionally female traits. Due to the fact that feminine gay men and masculine lesbians breach or are thought to breach traditional gender roles, heterosexuals expressed negative attitudes towards them. However, recent research concludes that images of homosexuals are becoming more complicated. According to Clausell and Fiske (2005), respondents when asked about images of gay men, identified both masculine and feminine traits, even though they described feminine traits such as cross dresser and flamboyant more frequently than masculine characteristics such as hyper masculine, physically fit and straight acting. In their research of stereotypes about lesbians, Geiger, Harwood and Hummert (2006) found that their respondents' attitudes consist of both positive and negative images. The positive stereotypes involved so-called lipstick lesbians that is they are beautiful, sexy, attractive and career-oriented feminist, while

the negative stereotypes involved hypersexual, sexually deviant (for example dirty, disgusting immoral) and angry butch. Heterosexuals not only possess images of gender inverted homosexuals but also gender confirming homosexuals. Hence, heterosexuals may show more negative attitudes towards feminine gay men and masculine lesbians compared to masculine gay men and feminine lesbians. Schope and Eliason (2004) research focused on whether heterosexuals' attitudes varied towards feminine and straight-acting gay men. Their respondents were asked what would be their reactions in twelve different situations such as studying in the respondent's room, hanging out at bar, and introducing to the respondent's parents. Even though they find that homosexuals who behave in cross-gender ways received some negative judgments, the final results did not hold those patterns. Instead than the violation of traditional gender roles, the authors debated that homosexuality itself developed negative attitudes among heterosexual respondents. These findings contrast previous studies, but Schope and Eliason (2004) did not control for the traditional gender role beliefs of their respondents, which illustrate their anomalous results. Heterosexuals are likely to perceive homosexuals as gender-inverted and consider that they violate traditional gender roles. Hence, heterosexuals who have almost traditional gender role attitudes may disclose negative attitudes toward homosexuals as they believe that homosexuals deserve to be punished for not following shared roles.

## **2. 2 Contact Theory**

Gordon W. Allport (1954) in *The Nature of Prejudice* proposed contact theory, where majority group members' prejudice toward a minority group is

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reduced through communication with members of the minority group. In order for contact theory to work adequately, four conditions must be met. First, the contact needs to take place between groups with equal status. If one group has higher reputation than the other, the interaction does not contribute to the reduction of negative attitudes. Second, group members have to work on trying to achieve the same objective, which creates solidarity among the members in the group. Third, cooperation not competition is essential. Fourth, institutional supports can raise the effect of contact. Researchers have been carrying out studies on whether contact theory is appropriate to different group settings, such as the interaction between Whites and Blacks (Fine, 1979), the general public and homeless people (Lee, Farrell and Link 2004), and many other groups. These researches showed the effectiveness of contact theory in explaining and reducing prejudice. At the same time, many researchers have reconstructed contact theory and they have offered many important challenges to the theory. First, Pettigrew (1998) proposed that personalized interaction should be an essential condition for contact theory to successfully minimize prejudice attitudes. One of the major problems associated with contact theory is causal order. It is uncertain whether those who have had previous contact with individuals from the prejudiced groups then have more positive attitudes or whether those who have more positive attitudes than have more contacts with group members (Baunach et al. n. d.; Van Dick et al. 2004; Herek and Glunt 1993; Pettigrew 1998). According to Pettigrew (1998), there are three ways to resolve the causal order; these are to study situations where respondents cannot make a voluntary decision to clarify with

members of prejudiced groups, to use special statistical means and to carry out a longitudinal study designs. Van Dick et al. (2004) conducted two studies utilizing the first and second methods to see whether the causal order from contact to prejudice correspond well than that from prejudice to contact. They believed that students could not avoid the interaction with racial minorities when they were in the racially mixed work places, schools and neighborhoods. Their results showed that contact increased acquaintances and colleagues and then diminish the antipathy toward racial minorities. The statistical tests found that the effect of contact to positive attitudes was greater than that of positive attitudes to contact. Longitudinal analysis performed by Eller and Abrams (2004) found that contact with prejudiced members positively altered positive attitudes. As these results showed, it may be appropriate to summarize that the causal order from contact to prejudice is the major causal ordering, instead of the opposite order from prejudice to contact. Another limitation of contact theory is the "problem of generalization." Contact theory believes that contact with members in a prejudice group influences the attitudes toward the whole group. But, it is ambiguous as to how individual can generalize their experience with a particular person or a small number of people to all of the prejudiced group members (Pettigrew 1998; Rothbart and John 1985). Hewstone and Brown (1986) presented one generalization process, while Brewer (1984) and Miller (1988) two generalization processes. Pettigrew debated that these three generalization processes can be efficient when they are used in the suggested order; (i) decategorization, (ii) high group status salience, and (iii) recategorization. Brewer (1984) and Miller (1988) and



Brewer (1996) advocated "deategorization" to be a possible generalization process. Individual "considers information at the individual level that replaces category identity as the most effective basis for categorizing respondents" (Brewer, 1996). Ideally, individual must develop their friendship through interpersonal communication. As the prejudiced membership status is a barrier to develop a close friendship, the prejudiced membership status should not be recognizable. In the process of interaction with gays and lesbians, homosexuals may develop friendship with heterosexuals without revealing their sexual orientation. Hewstone and Brown (1986) pointed out that individual can generalize the interaction with members from a prejudiced group to the whole group when the group salience obvious, as it keeps remembering respondents of their membership differences. Once a certain degree of friendship is built, the high group salience encourages the reduction of prejudice toward the whole group members. The respondents pay attention that they belong to different groups and can value their differences. Specifically, heterosexuals must be aware that their colleagues are homosexuals during the interaction. When the heterosexuals consider their homosexual friends as distant friends or colleagues, friend's homosexuality may be salient as homosexuality can be a master status. Lastly, "recategorization" implies that by stressing "subordinate category identification that surrounds both the in-group and out-group in a single social group representation," individual show less attention to the different membership status (Brewer, 1996: 294). In this stage, the participants point that member of minority group and themselves appertain to the same larger group. As such, heterosexuals might categorize their

homosexual friends based on the larger category like human beings and then they share distinct membership reputation. Hence, the prejudiced membership status, which is homosexuality in this case, does not become an obstacle to interactions. Eller and Abrams (2004) studied Britain's' prejudice toward French people and Mexican people's prejudice toward Americans by making use of contact theory. They also take into consideration whether the levels of categorization reconciled the effects of contact on prejudice reduction. Mexican and British participants who had contact with American and French people consequently categorized their friends either in the interpersonal category, which is equal to " decategorization" or in the super ordinate category which equals to " recategorization". These two variables did not act as mediators of contact. Instead, each variable had a direct and independent effect on prejudice reduction toward out group members. The participants who categorized their friends either in the interpersonal level or in the super ordinate level depicted a more positive attitude toward the whole out group members. Eller and Abrams (2004) determined that the levels of categorization show the quality of friendship. Heterosexual who maintain close relationship with homosexuals either classify their homosexual friends in the interpersonal level such as classmates and colleagues or on the super ordinate level for e. g. human beings. In either way, heterosexuals lay emphasis on the membership status which is shared with their homosexual friends. Hence, contact theory has been challenged and reconsidered by many researches. All over the reformulations, though, contact diminishes prejudice.

## 2.3 Heterosexism

Heterosexism is regularly discussed in feminist theory. Rich (1980) discussed that the oppression of women is inseparable from heterosexual relationships with men. She proposed the importance to call heterosexism as a form of oppression. Heterosexism is an effective approach to illustrate the power relationship between heterosexuals and homosexuals and to evaluate heterosexuals' negative attitudes toward homosexuals. Many theorists have distinguished the power relationship between heterosexuals and homosexuals to that between whites and blacks or between men and women; in other word, heterosexism is related to racism and sexism. Heterosexism shows negative attitudes toward homosexuals as not only a personal problem, but also a social structural delinquency (Adam 1998; Lorde 1984; Neisen 1990). Adam (1998) argued that the matrix that illustrates racism could be applied to heterosexual-homosexual relations. In brief, the distribution of incomes, the organization of social structure and everyday life and individual's classification of people into distinct categories are all based on sexual orientation. Hence, Neisen (1990) declared that many institutions, comprising family, religion and work, influence an individual's acceptance of stereotypes, perceptions of self-interest, stratification beliefs, and a sense of group position, all of which increase heterosexual privilege over homosexuals. One type of homosexual oppression is illustrated by feminist theories. As heterosexuality is powerful in society, and other types of sexuality are viewed as abnormal (Schneider and Gould 1987), heterosexual norms and values are broadcasted in television, movies, advertisements and song lyrics (Rich 1980). As stated by

Rubin (1984), "sexuality that is 'good', 'normal' and 'natural' must be heterosexual, marital, moral, reproductive and non-commercial." As such, men's control over women's reproduction in families reconstructs male and female homosexuals as abnormal (Adam, 1998). Gay men are not included into this structure as they do not build up a relationship with women, while lesbians are ignored as no man is present to take control. Another way to discuss heterosexuality in society is to analyze law. One facet of law is to express public morality that determine what is and is not acceptable (Leonard 1991). One example used by Leonard (1991) is when a lesbian mother is forbidden of visitation rights and joint custody as her homosexual relationship is viewed as inferior to the traditional male-female relationship. The court decision has great effects on the societal perception of homosexual relationships. Leonard (1991) declares that the "legal system is apparently no more homophobic or heterosexist as compared to the larger society, however because of its power to control individual's lives through stigmatization and discrimination, legal homophobia and heterosexism can be much more damaging." These examples show that homosexuality is viewed as bad, abnormal and unnatural by social institutions. Homosexual behaviors and patterns are viewed as being inferior to heterosexual individuals. For homosexuals living in the United States, achieving a positive homosexual identity and exposing the sexual orientation was no longer a major matter; instead finding friends, building relationships, acquiring legal rights and having their lives known by their co-workers, close friends and family members had become an issue (Seidman, Meeks and Traschen, 1999). In other word, American population has become more accepting of

homosexuals (Seidman et al. 1999). But homosexuals still have to negotiate as there still exist a chance of rejection, and heterosexism continues to present in law and regulation, policy and public culture (Seidman et al. 1999). Still, with whatever progress has been made, social constraints against homosexuals and assumption that everyone is heterosexual lead to many homosexuals pretending to heterosexual just to avoid prejudice from the heterosexuals. Homosexuals must be careful about the way they dress, the way they speak, and their gender performance. To conclude, sexuality provides the power relationship which accords benefits to those who follow heterosexual norm and keep away from those who violate them (Rubin, 1984). The approaches of heterosexism and role theory are interrelated. Role theory advocates those individuals are assigned to play roles based on their personal traits, such as gender. Once roles are attributed, individuals are supposed to satisfy their roles in the expected ways. In case they do not fill expected roles, they are given punishment. The distribution on roles and the shared expectation are based on heterosexuality. Hence, homosexuals are viewed to be violating expected roles and are being punished for doing that. Heterosexism is perpetuated by compelling individuals to satisfy expected roles and those who do not are being punished. But also, heterosexism contributes to decide who should be assigned to specific roles and how they should fill them. Heterosexism supports the macro level framework that heterosexuals are gaining more privilege over homosexuals. Due to the fact that individuals are socialized in the society, heterosexuality compared to homosexuality is being considered as normal and heterosexuals are likely to show negative attitudes toward gays and lesbians. Contact theory challenges

this concept and explains prejudice reduction at the individual level. Contact theory anticipate that heterosexuals who have personal interaction with homosexual show fewer prejudice attitudes towards all homosexuals. Even though individual's contact experience might not alter the heterosexist structure greatly, it is likely to alter individual's attitudes toward homosexuals.

### **Chapter 3: Homosexuality in Mauritius**

There are some distinct characteristics concerning the Mauritian culture, which may affect Mauritian youngsters' attitudes towards homosexuality. The environment for homosexuals, gender inverted images of homosexuals, gender role attitudes and religion in Mauritius are being discussed.

#### **3. 1 The Situation of homosexuals in Mauritius**

The Mauritian environment for gay men is changing moderately. Younger generations acquired more positive gay identity compared to previous generations. Younger generations had more chance to purchase magazine on gay-themed and had greater access to the gay-themed websites. Further, textbooks for sexual education courses have recently started to include homosexuality (Sunagawa, 2006). Homosexuals are starting to become familiar as a sexual minority in Mauritius. Nevertheless, the situation for homosexuals in Mauritius is still crucial when it comes to the topic of acceptance. A large amount of Mauritian homosexuals believe that their attraction to someone of the same sex is forbidden from the negative reactions from heterosexuals surrounding them. Mauritian's heterosexuals' prejudiced attitudes towards homosexuals have not changed over time.

Younger gay men were more likely to be harassed by their peers. Compared to the United States, the amount of physical assaults appears smaller; but, this may be because fewer Mauritian homosexuals disclose their sexual orientation to others. Homosexuals also have difficulties in making friends with other homosexuals. A great number of homosexuals make use of the internet to befriend other homosexuals. Even though the internet is a relatively anonymous medium, many homosexuals do not reveal their real names as homosexuals may be afraid of having their sexual orientation disclosed and to being labeled as homosexual by their family members and friends. Mauritian homosexuals in their twenties and thirties reported more stress than older homosexuals. At these ages, Mauritian homosexuals tend to go through different transitions, like joining the workforce and getting married. Hence, they feel more social pressure to accomplish their traditional male gender roles as workers and fathers. In the extreme case, homosexuals face social isolation and discrimination, such as being abandoned by family members and relatives, and they risk losing a job if their sexual orientation is revealed. This is why few homosexuals reveal their sexual orientation to family members and their heterosexual friends.

### **3. 2 Gender-Inverted Images of homosexuals in Mauritius**

The majority of Mauritian people take gay men to be feminine and lesbians to be masculine. In the 1950s, both masculine and feminine men were depicted equally without mentioning their sexual orientation. In the 1960s, magazines began to interpret gay men with feminine characteristics. With the help of media representations of cross-gender males in the 1980s and 1990s, many people were exposed to feminine gay men. At present,

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television stars are feminine gay men in real lives, while other male television stars and comedians make use of gender-inverted traits as performances, and are not homosexual. Hence, both feminine gay men and heterosexuals who perform gender-inversions are often represented on television. Due to the fact that those individuals who make use of gender-inverted traits as performances do not reveal their sexual orientation, viewers do not clearly differentiate gender-inverted heterosexual performers from feminine gay men. With the absence of depictions of masculine men being attracted to other masculine men in the mass media, Mauritians heterosexuals tend to connect gay men with cross-gender attitudes. Hence, the images of feminine gay men are widespread in Mauritius. Mauritians may link gay men to feminine traits more closely than they connect lesbians to masculine characteristics as the media represent effeminate gay men frequently, while lesbians are under-represented. As Mauritians have strong traditional gender role expectations, the images of feminine gay men and masculine lesbians may have negative impacts on attitudes towards homosexuals, especially male homosexuals.

### **3. 3 Gender Role Attitudes in Mauritius**

Sex role are different between men and women. On the masculinity side, men have more ability to lead, willingness to take risks, competitiveness and strong will while on the other side, women are more affectionate, tender, love children and like to care for others. Men's and women's masculinity attitudes are not largely different. This is contradictory to the expectation that the enforcement of traditional gender roles in Mauritius is severe. One of the main reasons for this result is that women are normally responsible for

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household chores, including childcare and financial management. As they are required to discipline their children and make money-related decisions, they learn masculine characteristics. In contrast, Mauritian men are often in hierarchical relationships based on seniority and status differences. Seniors are expected to take good care of their juniors, and juniors are expected to follow orders from and show respect to their seniors. The former role is similar to a mother's role, and the latter to a wife's role. This explanation makes sense only when the division of labor among Mauritian men and women is clear. There are unique aspects to the gender role attitudes of Mauritian individuals. Mauritians expect ideal men and women to have both masculine and feminine traits as both traits are necessary to be successful workers for men and leaders in the family for women, which sets the clear division of labor as a premise. On the other hand, Mauritian women are achieving egalitarian gender role attitudes as Mauritian men due to the women's rights movement and Mauritius' adaptation of Western lifestyles. Hence, it seems that there still exist a gap between women's gender role beliefs and their behavior.

### **3. 4 Religion in Mauritius**

Muritians have a distinct attitude toward religion. Mauritians have different religions. They do not practice only one religion or believe in only one God. Memorial services for ancestors do not come from these religions instead it arises from traditional fears of the spirits of the dead. Mauritian Christians consist of only a small percent of the Mauritian population. Christianity is unfamiliar as it is exclusive of other religions and is "at odds with their traditional pluralistic religiosity". Hence, Mauritians practice diverse religions

and do not have any strong ties to only one religion. Further, these religions are integrated into the Mauritian culture, making it hard for Mauritian to distinguish cultural acts from religious ones. Religion in Mauritius is different from other western countries such as the United States; therefore, it is difficult to measure religiosity of Mauritians. Typical methods may not explain their true religious practices and beliefs. Concerning the effects of religion on the attitudes of Mauritians toward homosexuality, all the religions mostly the Christianity prohibits homosexual acts. Hence, religion affects the attitudes of Mauritians towards homosexuality. Attitudes towards homosexuality are thus explained by a numerous factors. Individuals showing negative attitudes towards gay men and lesbians tend to be less educated, more authoritative and more traditional in sex roles (Herek, 1984 and 1991).