

Challenging Social Stigma: The Role of Human Rights Advocacy and Funding

IHRFG Semi-Annual Meeting, San Francisco, California
Tuesday, January 26, 2010, 9:15-10:45 am

Facilitator: **Matt Foreman**, Evelyn & Walter Haas, Jr. Fund

Speakers: **Randall Miller**, Evelyn & Walter Haas, Jr. Fund; **Gregory Herek**, University of California, Davis

Sponsor: Wellspring Advisors

Matt Foreman introduced the session by discussing the landscape of LGBTQ issues in the U.S. He shared some statistics on the percentage of U.S. states that offer protection to same-sex couples (44%), and that offer legal protection to transgender people (30%). He also said, however, that anti-gay violence is still high among high-school students, despite legal gains. Sixty percent of the U.S. population still believes that homosexual behavior is immoral.

Gregory Herek discussed the role of terminology in social stigma, the manifestations of stigma in society, and different types of stigma.

- *Homo "phobia"* implies anti-gay attitudes based on fear and untenable assumptions; suggests a psychological fear. This term is used too broadly.
- *Sexual stigma* = toward non-heterosexual persons. There is culturally shared knowledge of sexual stigma toward certain groups.
- Types of Structural Sexual Stigma:
 - Institutional level: embodiment of stigma in society's laws, media, and educational institutions
 - Individual level: Not apparent at initial interaction, but exists based on perceptions
- Manifestations of Stigma:
 - Enacted: slurs, violence, discrimination
 - Felt: understanding that enacted stigma may occur (example: gay men walking down the street)
 - Internalized: among minorities, or self-directed, such as people accepting that there is something negative about being homosexual
- Important Points:
 - Stigma can be reduced at broader institutional level, such as in law, education, and religion.
 - People begin to get a sense of devaluing another group on individual level.
 - African Americans have had statutory equality for almost 40 years, but discriminations still exists. Why?
 - Because unlike racial prejudice, nature of sexual orientation is that many people in society have LGBTQ people within their families, friends, and colleagues. This integration has been the most potent way to change attitudes and end individual prejudice.

Randall Miller discussed how religion is a structural supporter of homophobia, and a reason for homophobic views in society. Meanwhile, foundations are working on projects to tackle faith-based homophobia by supporting a faith-based public education campaign to change hearts and minds. Recurring challenges in the LGBTQ movement have been the following conflicts:

- *Us vs. Them*
 - When people form group core identities, there is a strong pushback. Others feel that you are threatening that identity.
 - Need powerful in-group “validators,” so that when social conflict arises, will still be on their side
- *God vs. Gays*
 - People feel that they have to choose
 - Primary opposition to moral acceptance of homosexuals is religion
 - Clergy: source of strong negative opinion against moral acceptance
 - Even liberals have to choose between religious tradition and acceptance

Design Steps of Campaign to reform this structure:

- Conduct necessary research
- Identify and narrow target population
- Test delivery messages
- Create effective delivery networks
- Launch

Research Summary: Random survey of 6000 mainline clergy (liberal protestant churches):

- 1/3 clergy make up “anxious middle”
- Clergy does not want to talk about issue of homosexuality, but parishioners want clergy to talk about it
- Clergy has no training in sexuality.

Summary: Focus on message development and delivery to clergy and parishioners.

Questions and Answers:

Q: How do funders (in audience) fund against stigma?

AJWS: Fund in LGBTQ communities where people are banned from families and villages, and there is violence and threats against them.

Disability Rights Fund: By building rights of people with disability who have been invisible in society in order to integrate this population back into society.

Channel Foundation: Funding women in post-war conflict situations (victims of rape and sexual violence), to change women from being stigmatized victims to being an active change in their society.

Q: How can funders reach LGBTQ communities in rural areas?

A: Cities are typically refugee centers for stigmatized populations, and so the impact trickles from cities to rural communities.

A: Atlantic Philanthropies publishes a report on outreach strategies, and how to fund in rural areas.

Comment: The formation of Christian identity in African countries has meant rejection of cultural values. African countries took on Christian identity and stigma against minority populations, including LGBTQ populations.

Comment: Four Freedoms Fund is working on a program with local communities that focus on the intersection of LGBTQ and immigrants rights.