

Atlantic Fleet), for example, there are so many available sailors that many of the "seafood queens" become specialists, adopting one particular ship and its crew or one occupational speciality (such as radarman or boatswain's mate) to the exclusion of others.

Not well known is the fact that a great deal of the motivation for those generally heterosexual sailors who become repeatedly involved with gay men as trade is not sexual or financial at all. The young common sailor, generally at the bottom of the shipboard hierarchy and often dismissed with contempt by civilians at large, finds himself treated like royalty, his male ego enhanced, his gripes given sympathetic attention. Instead of taking orders all the time, he finds himself in a position to give them. Instead of the usual sterile environment of cramped shipboard quarters, he gets to relax in a home environment where he can kick back, watch television, and have his every need attended to.

Literary and Artistic Images. The sexual fascination with sailors was often expressed, though sometimes cryptically, in literary works. Major monuments are the sea novels of Herman Melville; in *White-Jacket* (1850) the title character declares, "sailors, as a class, entertain the most liberal notions concerning morality . . . or rather, they take their own views of such matters." In 1895 Adolfo Caminha published a novel, *Bom-Crioulo*, offering a frank view of an interracial affair between two Brazilian sailors. Among twentieth-century novels, Jean Genet's *Querelle of Brest* (1947) is outstanding for its transposition of the sailor image into the author's own powerful moral universe. In its turn the book was made into a film by the German gay director Rainer Werner Fassbinder. The multitalented Jean Cocteau offered a dual homage to sailors in poetry and drawings. Christopher Bram's novel *Hold Tight* (1988) portrays the spy-catching career of a sailor in a male brothel in New York City during World War II. The American painters Paul Cadmus and

Charles Demuth showed sailors on shore leave as the object of the attention of gay men. Depictions of sailors, often emphasizing the characteristic contours of the bell-bottom trousers and the jaunty set of the cap, have been a staple of pornographic drawings, photographs, and films.

Much research remains to be done, especially as regards homosexual behavior among Muslim, Chinese, Japanese, and other non-Western sailors. There can be no doubt, however, that seafaring, with its characteristic appeal to escape from the constraints of land-based civilization, has been a major focus of male homosexual imagination.

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Stephen Donaldson

SELF-ESTEEM

Self-esteem refers to the evaluative dimension of the self-concept: the attitude that an individual adopts and customarily maintains with regard to the self as good or bad. It reflects the extent to which an individual believes the self to be capable, significant, and worthy. Self-esteem thus implies an overall attitude of self-acceptance, self-respect, and self-worth independent of context. Rosenberg notes that "A person with high self-esteem is fundamentally satisfied with the type of person he is" while a person with low self-esteem "lacks respect for himself, considers himself unworthy, inadequate, or oth-

erwise seriously deficient as a person." In many ways, self-esteem is the quintessential individual characteristic for Western society.

Theories Viewing Homosexual Persons as Deficient in Self-Esteem. Traditional psychological and sociological theories frequently view the homosexual person as living a lonely, depressed life, conceiving and despising the self as inferior. This state exists, it is believed, because of longstanding developmental handicaps that the homosexual condition imposes or because of the negative effects that a **homophobic** social world has on one's sense of **identity**. In either case, it appears inevitable and, to some, even justifiable that the homosexual individual will devalue the self, resulting in self-contempt and a negative self-image.

A plethora of theoretical and empirical work has appeared to explain the purported deficient self-esteem level of the gay and lesbian population. Most theories of gay and lesbian self-esteem focus on the etiological connection between self-evaluation and sexual **orientation**. For example, some **psychoanalytic** theorists attribute to homosexuality, by definition, a wide range of neurotic problems that relate to how an individual evaluates himself or herself. Because of their developmental history, which is purported to be responsible for both the sexual orientation and the negative self-image, homosexual persons have (in this view) serious personality disturbances, engendering feelings of self-inadequacy, sadistic and masochistic behavior, and suicidal gestures.

Varying the theoretical perspective but not the fundamental conclusions, sociological theorists are far less concerned with inner psychological dynamics. Rather, this perspective emphasizes the state of the external world and its subsequent impact on self-evaluation among homosexual persons. Low self-esteem is the result of internalizing negative values and attitudes—the reflected appraisals—of

significant others in her or his world during the childhood years, especially those of parents, siblings, and teachers. There is a clear message given to the growing child: sexual minority **youth** often feel bad about themselves, have a poor self-image and low self-esteem and, especially during their teenager years, feel totally alone.

One need not necessarily experience the negative social reactions directly—say, by being harassed by peers or fired from a job; the imagined sense or expectation of negative sanctions can be more powerful than a direct assault on one's self-image. The mass media frequently incorporate anti-homosexual cultural meanings and behaviors; apprehensions of **discrimination** that can emanate from this exposure may have serious repercussions for one's self-image as a gay or lesbian person.

More Balanced Approaches. Empirical studies testing these theoretical assumptions concerning the negative self-esteem felt by gay men and lesbians were first stimulated by Evelyn Hooker's (1957) research with non-pathological homosexual individuals. She concluded that homosexual persons are not necessarily maladjusted individuals filled with self-loathing and low self-esteem who experience difficulty in **functioning**. In a review of subsequent empirical studies that compared the self-esteem level of gay and lesbian subjects with that of heterosexual men and women, Savin-Williams (1990) found that eight of the 16 studies comparing lesbians with heterosexual women found no difference in mean self-esteem level; six, higher scores for lesbians; and two, higher scores for straight women. Eighteen of the 30 studies comparing males reported no difference in self-esteem level; five, higher scores for gay men; and seven, higher scores for straight men.

Empirical research on the self-esteem of gay men and lesbians not only fails to substantiate the theoretical speculations of a number of writers, in the case of lesbians the findings tend to contradict

the psychological and sociological theorists. Apparently, despite the "developmental handicaps" of growing up alienated and alone within a heterosexual home and an alien society, most gay men and lesbians manage to evolve a healthy and positive self-image in the process of coming out.

Research Perspectives. It is not particularly profitable to focus on group differences in self-esteem level between gay and straight subjects. More important are investigations that explore the developmental experiences of those gay and lesbian individuals who maintain a negative self-image in contrast with those who view the self as a positive entity, thus apparently insulating themselves against societal messages to the contrary. If this focus becomes primary, then there is hope that the social sciences will be in a better position to address the fundamental issues of self-esteem among gay men and lesbians. As a result, policies and programs that attempt to assist those gay and lesbian individuals who experience negative self-feelings and self-images will be better informed and thus more effective.

Equally critical is the need to expand the self-esteem literature beyond the evaluative aspect to embrace perceptual and cognitive dimensions of the self. Especially needed are in-depth longitudinal studies that trace the evolving sense of self as a gay or lesbian person from the first moments of cognition in infancy and childhood to full recognition—and acceptance—during maturity.

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Ritch Savin-Williams

SEMIOTICS, GAY

In general usage semiotics denotes a scholarly discipline concerned with the interpretation of signs. Although the roots of the field go back at least to the time of John Locke (1632-1704), semiotics first drew notice from a larger public with the spread of the structuralist vogue in the 1960s and 1970s.

The expression *gay semiotics* has been proposed with the more limited sense of the repertoire of symbols and artifacts displayed on the person to signal one's membership in the homosexual community or some sector of it—in short, tokens of sexual preference or allegiance. Typically, these attributes of nonverbal communication have been chosen so that the meaning is evident to initiates but obscure to outsiders. In this respect *gay semiotics* recalls the symbolism of *freemasonry*, with the important difference that it is not decreed or regulated from above by some central authority, but disseminated by piecemeal invention from below. Absolute secrecy is not a necessity: in the case of the *lambda pendant* and the *pink triangle button*, the wearer may seek to elicit questions from the curious, which then give the gay person a cue to present his or her explanatory "rap."

Among *sadomasochists*, or those flirting with the idea, keys are worn externally on the right or left to indicate the S or M respectively (though in some circles the laterality may be reversed). A similar function is served by the red handkerchief protruding from the right or left back pocket. Urban *folklore*—assisted by commercially produced cards—maintains that there is a whole range of different hanky colors identifying different preferences, but the suggested guidelines do not seem to be followed very closely. As the key and handkerchief codes have spread to outsiders—a common feature of the diffusion of mass culture—the meaning has become blurred.

In the early 1980s some gay men took to carrying a small teddy bear in their