

The Psychological Basis of Homophobia: Cultural Construction of a Barrier

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Abstract The main goals of this article are: (a) to analyze the intricate relations between sexuality, gender, culture and power, and more precisely, the connections between homophobia and sexism; and (b) to analyze the psychological and cultural basis of homophobia and its affective roots. The model of the semiotic regulatory system and the general notion of tension between the two processes (specified by Ernest Boesch)—*Heimweh* (“homeward road”—striving towards the known and the secure) and the *Fernweh* (“road to the far away”—adventure, encountering novelty) is used as the theoretical ways to analyze homophobia as a cultural barrier. It is suggested: homophobia is a boundary phenomenon of affective meaning making, a collective historical–cultural construction. Presented in the conclusion are some implications of the promotion of strategies against homophobia in our societies.

Keywords Homophobia · Sexism · Cultural psychology · Power · Cultural meanings · Symbolic boundaries

Homophobia is defined as the *fear and hatred of homosexuality*. Homophobia can discourage intimacy between same-sex friends if it makes them fear being labeled as gay or lesbian. Thus, *homophobia works as a system of social control*. This is especially, but not exclusively, apparent in relationships among men where homophobia establishes boundaries of intimacy between men. Despite cultural strictures that discourage gay relationships between men, much of men’s interaction is in homosocial settings (i.e., segregated settings that include only men). Studies of interaction between men in such settings find that their interaction is based on emotional detachment, competitiveness, and the sexual objectification of women. Thought these forms of interaction, social concepts of

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masculinity are re-created and reinforced, with boundaries created between men that separate them from identification with homosexuality even in these homosocial environments. At the same time, *the men interact in ways that lead them to devalue qualities that are associated with women... thus, homophobia not only limits the character of intimacy among men but it also reinforces sexist attitudes toward women* (Andersen 2000, p. 94, added emphasis).

If prejudices were only cognitive phenomena, providing information and changing cognitive comprehension of the issues involved would be sufficient to fight against prejudices in our societies. It would be sufficient to provide the necessary information in our schools and values would change. However, the problem is much more complex—complex relations between cognitive and affective dimensions exist within human beings. This is especially true regarding the phenomena of prejudices.

Prejudices have deep affective roots and they work, many times, at the hyperconscious level, at a *hyper-generalized affective semiotic field* (Valsiner 2005). To study the central role of affective fields in human development could be an interesting way to psychology to develop a better understanding of the phenomena of prejudices, and why it is so hard to change them. Prejudices—like sexism, racism, homophobia etc.—are negatives (pre)conceptions related to a specific social group that support discrimination practices against this particular social group (Itani 1998; Pinsky 2001). Discrimination, in few words, is prejudice in action. *In order to develop effective strategies against prejudices and discriminatory practices in daily life, we have to better understand such phenomena.*

It is essential to analyze the psychological basis of prejudice, and for our present goals, to understand the psychological basis of homophobia. This cannot happen from an individualistic and self-contained psychological perspective, but through understanding the issue from a perspective that articulates adequately the subjective level and the socio-cultural level of human life.

Sexuality and Gender: The Centrality of Culture and Power

Sexuality, Gender, Culture and Power Relationships

Many studies in the context of human sciences have stressed the complexity of sexuality issues. Contrary to the deceptively simple idea “sexuality = sexual instinct”, these investigations have shown intricate links between sexuality, power relationships, beliefs, values, social and institutional practices (e.g. Bourdieu 2005; Costa 1996; Heilborn 1999; Loyola 1999; Louro 1998, 1999, 2003; Madureira 2000; Madureira and Branco 2002, 2004; Parker 1991, 1999; Weeks 1999).

Also, gender studies have presented several critical analyses about the biological essentialism present in people’s daily life and in traditional biomedicine models (Costa 1996). The concept of gender expresses an important heuristic value concerning the understanding of the cultural and psychological basis of the process of becoming a man or a woman. The development of the gender concept expresses the important exchange between the scientific enterprise and the feminist movement.

In a broader sense, the feminist movement, as a political movement, has fought against the hierarchical structure of gender, and against the socio-historical inequalities between men and women (Louro 1998).

Therefore, the concept of gender—as an analytic and political tool—helps to reject the assumptions underling discourses about the ‘natural’ inequalities between men and women that are based on biological differences. According to Joan Scott (1995),

“(…) Gender is the social organization of sexual difference. The concept [gender] is not a reflection of biological reality, but gender constructs the meaning of this reality (…)” (p. 115).

In few words, gender is an analytical concept that promotes the understanding of diverse phenomena from different fields in the context of human sciences. As an analytical concept, gender stresses the fundamental role of culture in the process of becoming men and women. Nowadays, we can say that gender issues have an important role concerning individual development (Golombok and Fivush 1994; Madureira and Branco 2004).

In opposition to abstract conceptions about human beings, gender and sexuality studies stress the centrality of culture and power in the processes of construction of multiple social identities. The concept of *power*—understood as the relation between forces of oppression and resistance—was proposed by Michel Foucault (1996). It is a promising theoretical concept used in various investigations within the context of gender and sexuality studies.

Likewise, the notion of *culture* is a central construct that makes it possible to analyze the symbolic nature of human development. Culture is not an “influence” upon human development: Culture constitutes the person, and forms—in a significant sense—his/her own development (Bruner 1997; Cole 1992; Rogoff 2003; Valsiner 2005). From the socio-cultural constructivist perspective (Branco and Valsiner 1997; Madureira and Branco 2005a; Valsiner 1994a, b), the articulation between culture and the active role of individual is a constitutive mark of human development:

The *sociocultural constructivist* approach here adopted refers to a theoretical framework where coconstructive processes lie at the core of human development. The two terms (*sociocultural* and *constructivist*) are here used to particularly stress the fundamental and intertwined nature of socio-historical *cultural contexts* and *active individual*, who significantly transforms sociocultural messages as the simultaneous processes of internalization/externalization takes place (Madureira and Branco 2004, p. 166).

In our theoretical framework, the behaviorists’ preferred concept of “behaviour” is not appropriate. The studies of human beings within the context of cultural psychology have stressed the concept of conduct as cultural behaviour. In other words, conduct is behaviour transformed by semiotic mediation that is used by the person oneself (the intentional and active mediator) (Valsiner 2005).

Therefore, for understanding conduct is essential to consider the central role of semiotic mediation (Vygotsky 1991). In the context of this paper, it is important to analyze the cultural meanings related to gender and sexuality issues and, more precisely, the symbolic connections between sexism and homophobia.

Connections Between Homophobia and Sexism

(...) Thus, while male scholars writing about sexual relations between males have generally overlooked the gendered and social character of same-sex love, feminists interpreters have largely failed to include female homoeroticism as a part of the history of women or as a subject for gender analysis (...) (Brooten 1996, p.14)

Homophobia and sexism are both cultural inventions that contribute to the constant process of creation and maintenance of important symbolic boundaries. When those symbolic boundaries are transgressed, we can see the violence becoming linked with most prejudices. We can see the prejudices in social action—in various discriminatory practices. So, homophobia and sexism are intricately linked to the macro-social, inter- and intra-psychological levels.

From a general perspective, sexism corresponds to an exclusive separation¹ of genders, prioritizing one over other, and associating dismissive meanings orientation to the “other”. In other words, *sexism = rigid distinction of genders + unequal power relations + constructed prejudice to mark the unequal relation*. At the macro-social level of analysis, we can perceive the reproduction of a hierarchical structure of gender that expresses inequalities between men and women in different domains. In the context of sexuality interdisciplinary studies is fundamental to consider gender issues:

(...) Because gender includes beliefs about sexual behaviour, it is one of the primary crucibles within which sexuality is produced. Sexualities are informed by and embedded in conceptions of gender; that is, they are embedded in gender ideologies that enable and structure differential practices for women and men (...) (Blackwood 2000, p. 229).

(...) From these cases it is clear that gender ideologies are critical to the production of men’s and women’s sexualities. Such ideologies work to produce very different sets of ideas about what men and women desire. By establishing certain ideas about who and what men and women are, gender ideologies create different possibilities for men’s or women’s understanding of their desires and their access to other sexual partners (Blackwood 2000, p. 232).

Gender is a relational concept—best viewed as a field. In other words, it is more productive to adopt a relational perspective than use the generic conception of masculine (or feminine) “oppression”. Of course, the phenomena of oppression exist—as in any social relation—also within gender relations, but if we stop our analysis at the level of generic labels, we will not fully understand the complex power relationships between men and women in different cultures.

In this respect, Hoodfar (1997) analyzes issues concerning fertility and sexual politics in the context of Egyptian Muslim society in Cairo. She analyzes the

¹The conception of exclusive separation expresses the mechanical notion of dualism. While the conception of inclusive separation expresses the notion, from the dialectical philosophical tradition, of tension of opposites (dualities) united within the same whole.

meaning system surrounding feminine circumcision. According to the Western point of view, arguments in favour of circumcision are a disturbing, because the author analyzes how feminine circumcision is deeply associated with the cultural logic of the Egyptian Muslim society. What emerges from the analysis is that circumcision is not just a simple “masculine oppression” against women.

Along similar lines, Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2005) analyzes the issue of imposing virginity tests in Palestinian society. The author presented a dramatic social reality where legal, medical and informal discourses are articulated to promote a strict control of feminine sexuality. These discourses justify, for example, the practice of femicide against female adolescents/adults who were sexually abused, and were perceived as dishonour for their families.

According to the author’s ideas, it urges a “(...) *more elastic feminism that takes into account the specificities of ‘contexts’* (...)” (p. 1190, emphasis added). A concrete example consists of the model termed “Blocking Her Exclusion”:

“(...) the model uses existing resources such as cultural and anecdotes to convince the victim’s family and other officials that the ethics of victim protection is ingrained within the culture and not an imported, Western value (...)” (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2005, p. 1193).

The balance between the respect of human rights and the respect of meanings, values and practices in specific cultural contexts, for sure is not an easy dilemma. The radical relativism perspective presents some problematic implications in terms of human rights. For instance, is it ethically acceptable the homicide of a young woman, because she “injured the honour” of her family group? Should we respect all kind of cultural practices? (Wikan 2002).

However, the respect for human rights without a broad analysis of the cultural specificities involved could be easily considered a new form of colonialism, with a generic label: “the respect of human rights”. For instance, the colonialism of rich Western countries relate to African and Middle East countries (for implicit economic motives). So, *to seek a balance between the respect of human rights and the respect for cultural differences is a central issue to handle this complex dilemma.*

When we think about power issues—understood as the relation between forces of oppression and resistance (Foucault 1996)—we can perceive a complex frame, especially, when we consider inter-psychological and intra-psychological levels. In these levels, it is possible to analyze a dynamic dance between the forces of oppression and resistance present in social and sexual relations between men and women and also between same sex partners.

Sexism, as a kind of prejudice, is not present just “in men’s mind”, it can be found in social relations, daily life and institutional practices. Women, also, reproduce sexist conceptions and, many times, their actions are like a trigger for social control against the conduct of other women (Hoodfar 1997). Therefore, social control—based on a sexist point of view—is not just a phenomenon that occurs between different genders, but also occurs at the level of intra-gender domain (Parker 1991).

Sexism is directly related to power focus escalations between different genders and intra-gender relations. Therefore, homophobia is needed for keeping up sexism. It is essential to integrate the studies about homophobia and sexism, both have a central role in the maintenance of rigid boundaries between men and women

(Andersen 2000) between heterosexual population and the GLTB (gays, lesbians, transgender and bisexuals) population. Last, but not least, homophobia and sexism are central for the maintenance of a high level of power inequalities, and are central elements for power escalation in social interaction in different domains of daily life.

Power is a fundamental concept to understand the association between homophobia and sexism. However, when we use the concept of power we are not referring just to inequalities in macro social structures. From complex processes of (active) internalization and externalization (Valsiner 1994a, b), the power relationships become part of the personal cultures (Valsiner 2007) of individuals. The social control that acts to maintain the rigid symbolic boundaries between men and women, between a normative view of heterosexuality and non-hegemonic sexual identities (Madureira 2000; Madureira and Branco 2002), becomes affectivity embodied. These issues will be analyzed in a deeper sense later, in the next topics of this paper.

From Specificity of Cultural Contexts to a Broader Level of Understanding

We can confirm—based on research in different socio-cultural contexts—the fundamental role of the cultural meanings and practices concerning gender and sexuality issues. We can also notice the role of power relationships in the complex process of the construction of people's relationships with their own corporal experience, sexual desires, sexual practices, social relations among men and women and fertility practices. Some examples of research in different contexts illustrate the central role of power, cultural meanings and practices, in relation to gender and sexuality issues. For instance, Hall (1992) analyzes the articulation between: (a) medical/scientific discourses; (b) moralistic discourses; and (c) religious discourses against the masturbation practice among men in Great Britain (1850–1950). Those different discourses together promoted a “crusade” against masturbation, and, in a broader sense, against pleasures and sexual feelings.

It is relevant to note that this “crusade” against the “mundane” pleasures and sexual feelings has ancient historical roots in Western societies. From the Judaic–Christianity tradition, saintliness equals asceticism and “(...) the world we live in [and its pleasures] as the realm of Satan.” (Delumeau 1990, p. 446). Ben-Ari (2001) looked at the experiences of “not belonging” in collectivist communities, from the narratives of ten gay men who experienced their adolescence on Kibbutzes (Israel) throughout the 1970s. The author uses the concept of total institutions, developed by Erving Goffman, to show the existence of many obstacles in Kibbutzes that deal with diversity, in a broader sense, and with the sexual orientations diversity. As Ben-Ari (2001) argues, it “(...) also reflects the linkage between total institutions and essentialist frameworks, pointing to the very limited room for personal choice and expression of one's individuality” (p. 112).

The classic research conducted by Gilbert Herdt (1980) about the semen depletion and the sense of masculinity among the Sambia in New Guinea is an interesting example of the multiplicity of cultural practices relate to the construction of gender identity. For the majority of men and women in Western societies the construction of masculinity in this society may seem bizarre and completely unexpected. Among the Sambia the hegemonic masculinity identity is constructed from institutionalized

ritual in which homosexual practices are central, more precisely from the ritual of fellatio:

Institutionalized homosexual practices are made the object of the most vital and secret ritual teachings in first-stage initiation. The novices are expected to serve as fellators and be inseminated. Homosexual relationships are rigidly structured: novices may only act as fellators in private, appropriate sexual contacts with older bachelors, who are seen as dominant and primarily in the control of the homosexual contacts. (...) Homosexual intercourse is hidden from women and children, it is based on the fetishization of the boy's mouth as a sexual orifice; and, *during intercourse*, most bachelors both consciously and subliminally avoid any contact with a boy's genitals, or psychological involvement with him as a whole person. All homosexual inseminations are purported to have nutritive functions in 'growing' (i.e. masculinizing) the boys. Puberty and third-stage initiation results in the psychosexual transition from being a fellator to a sexually mature fellated. Following marriage, when a youth's wife reaches the menarche, he should de-escalate his involvement in homosexual practices; and, with the achievement of fatherhood, the vast number of Sambia men become exclusively heterosexual. (...) Biological femaleness is considered 'naturally' competent and innately complete; maleness, on the other hand, is considered more problematic, since males are believed incapable of achieving adult reproductive manliness without ritual treatment (Herdt 1980, p. 84–85).

Our dualistic concepts of heterosexual and homosexual identities based in an essentialist view of sexuality and gender become clearly problematic when we analyze the research above. In a similar way, Blackwood (2000) presents in her paper different research about cases of female same-sex sexuality in different cultural contexts. For instance, she presents a study done in Lesotho (Gay 1986 quoted by Blackwood 2000), a country surrounded by the nation of South Africa. In this country, there are institutionalized intimate friendships between younger and older girls called "mummy–baby" relationships.

These relationships are perceived "(...) as an affair or romance; hugging, kissing, and sexual relations are part of it (...) the intensity of mummy–baby relations usually ends with marriage (...) but many women maintain the bonds of friendship with other women after marriage (...)") (Blackwood 2000, p. 225). In this cultural context the women are perceived as agents of their own sexuality. This is an interesting example of mutuality between gender and sexuality. Surely, it does not make sense to adopt the dualistic concept of homosexuality *versus* heterosexuality to interpret the cultural practices and meanings relate to the affective–sexual experiences among women in Lesotho.

There are many other studies that illustrate the essential role of culture and power in human development, especially the study of the processes that relate the construction of sexual desires, practices and sexual and gender identities. The role of culture and power concerning gender and sexuality issues is observed in different social institutions. We see that in medicine—and its new technologies of intervention, in law, scientific discourses and so on. We see that in daily life

practices, such as gossiping among neighbours etc. (e.g. Kaufert and O’Neil 1993; Ben-Ari 2001).

The construction of new knowledge in the scientific enterprise, however, seeks generalization beyond the specificities of diverse cultural contexts. As Valsiner (2005) claims, cultural psychology is universalistic in this generalizations and particularistic in its analysis of cases. It is important to stress that the focus of cultural psychology is “(...) deeply phenomenological—the human lived-through experience—rather than behaviour (...)” (Valsiner 2007, author’s preface, p. 1). This phenomenological focus is related to a psychology of concern, distant to “aseptic” hegemonic theoretical and methodological traditions in psychological science (Lonner and Hayes 2007). The cultural psychology field has built from knowledge was constructed by different disciplines: developmental science, sociology, anthropology, history, semiotics, and philosophy.

So, it is possible to ask: How could cultural psychology help us in the search for a broader understanding about the affective roots of prejudices and discriminatory practices, especially in the case of homophobia? How could our understanding about the homophobia help us on the complex changeling to develop strategies against homophobia in the context of our social institutions and daily life practice in our societies?

The Psychological Basis of Homophobia: Insights from Cultural Psychology

Homophobia as a Collective Cultural–Historical “Phobia”

(...) Learning to decode and recognize homophobia as a problem of oppression in society rather than as a deficit in the self is the focus of many group discussions on homophobia (...) (Herdt 1982, p.47).

Russel and Bohan (2006) who—reflecting upon Martín-Baró’s point of view, realize that “(...) when we focus exclusively on changing individuals, the net effect is that we leave the social order unchanged (...)” (p. 347). For the construction of a comprehensive and potentially social changing analysis of the psychological basis of homophobia, we have to concentrate on cultural practices and meanings in concrete contexts. So, both the psychological and cultural basis of the phenomena have to be articulated. We have to go beyond a generic analysis. It is not enough to say that there is prejudice against homosexual people in society, and they then internalize this homophobia.²

In this sense, it is essential to analyze the meanings concerning the term “homophobia”:

- What are phobias?
- Is homophobia an example of phobia?

²For a critical analysis about the concept of Internalized Homophobia (IH) from a Postmodern perspective, see: Russell and Bohan (2006).

There are three different categories of phobias (DSM-IV, 1994):³ (a) *Agoraphobia*—“Irrational anxiety about being in places from which escape might be difficult or embarrassing”; (b) *Social phobia*—“Irrational anxiety elicited by exposure to certain types of social or performance situations, also leading to avoidance behaviour”; (c) *Specific phobia*—“Persistent and irrational fear in the presence of some specific stimulus which commonly elicits avoidance of that stimulus” (i.e. insects). Irrationality is an important characteristic of phobias: “By definition, phobias are *irrational*, meaning that they interfere with one’s everyday life or daily routine”.⁴

We can perceive the existence of different links between phobias, anxiety, fear and irrationality. In this sense, is it appropriate to use the term homophobia? Probably, the best answer is a paradoxical answer: yes, and no. Why?

Homophobia, like other phobias, is associated with a deep feelings of discomfort (like anxiety, fear and, in extreme cases, hate) relate to people that have affective and sexual relations with same sex partners. These feelings appear as expressions of irrationality by homophobic people. But, according our hypothesis, these are not the result of “irrational feelings” constructed just from an individual history (i.e., snake phobia). In this direction, *homophobia is not a kind of phobia, but a boundary phenomenon built by affective meaning making, a collective historical–cultural construction*. In our point of view, although there are some common aspects between homophobia and phobias in general, it is not accurate or productive to consider homophobia as just one more example of phobia.

It is essential to note that homophobia has deep collective historical–cultural roots and deep affective roots. Homophobia promotes and recognizes certain kinds of sexual desires, practices and identities, according to hegemonic social values. In this sense, to develop our understanding about this phenomenon, we have to articulate different levels of analysis: (a) the macro social level; (b) the inter-psychological level; and (c) the intra-psychological level. Beyond this complex articulation between different levels of analysis, it is necessary to pay special attention for the fundamental role of affective fields.

The conceptualization of homophobia as a boundary phenomenon of affective meaning making and a collective historical–cultural construction could be a promising theoretical model. This model would be useful for elaborating strategies against homophobia in society.

For instance, a person A interacts in his/her daily life with person B. Person A thinks: person B is a ‘normal’ [heterosexual] and nice person (see Fig. 1). Then, person A discovers that person B is a gay/lesbian. Now, for person A, person B becomes another person. He/she is not a ‘normal’ person, he/she is an immoral [dangerous] person. Feelings of discomfort emerge and the semi permeable boundary between person A and person B becomes a non-permeable boundary: a “barrier” [homophobia] (see Fig. 2).

Both Figs. 1 and 2 show the tension, as has been emphasized by Ernest Boesch, between *HEIMWEH* versus *FERNWEH*. In other words, the relations between

³Site: <http://phobialist.com/class.html>. This site was visited on 10.30.06.

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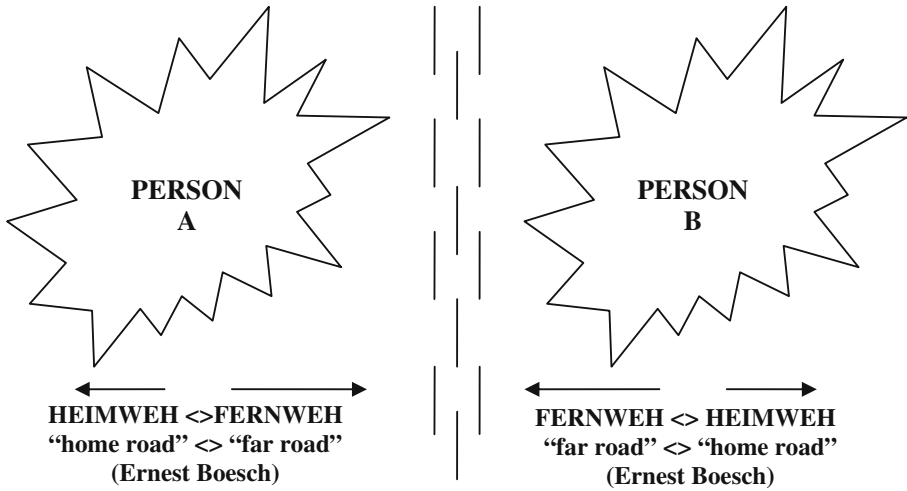


Fig. 1 The semi-permeable boundary between person A and person B

person and other express the tension between know/security/“home road” *versus* unknown/insecurity/“far road”. In Fig. 2, we can observe a new configuration of this tension in the case of person A: the process relate to *HEIMWEH* became much stronger than the process relate to *FERNWEH*.

It is interesting to perceive that the tension in these processes is a general cultural psychological principle, as stressed by Valsiner (2006) in his study of the psychological aspects of the urban environment. His study focused on the cultural and personal meanings concerning the “street”. At the same time, the street is dangerous and alluring, free and un-free. It is a place that expresses the tension between two general cultural–psychological processes have emphasized by Ernest Boesch—the *FERNWEH* process (foreign, unknown, and thrilling) and the

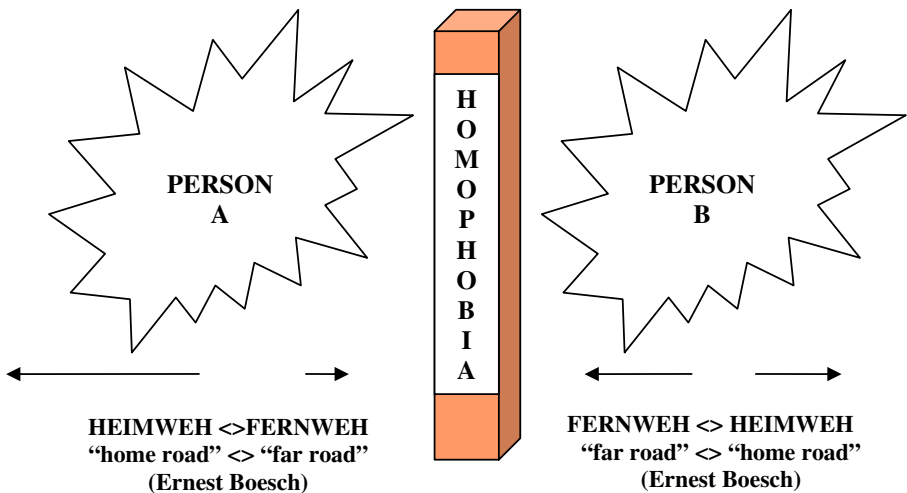


Fig. 2 Homophobia as a “barrier”, a not permeable boundary

HEIMWEH process (towards the known, familiar, safe). Human beings are in movement at the boundaries of the known and the unknown, safe and thrilling (Valsiner 2006).

When the others are perceived as threatening—as impure, immoral, sinner, sick (cultural meanings associate to homosexuality)—there is the tendency for the *HEIMWEH* process to become stronger. A barrier is erected. For our purposes in this paper, we consider this barrier as exemplified by homophobia. If this barrier become much stronger, the fear, the anxiety will express the desire to eliminate the other, the “source of discomfort feelings”. In one word: hate.

There are deep connections between the collective historical–cultural roots—expressed by the strong pejorative meanings associated to the non-hegemonic sexual identities⁵ (Madureira 2000)—and the affective roots of homophobia. Therefore, it is essential to better understand the tension between the processes of *HEIMWEH* versus *FERNWEH* and the affective implications of this tension in the phenomenon of homophobia. The theoretical articulation of these general principles (*HEIMWEH* versus *FERNWEH*) and the model of semiotic regulatory system (Valsiner 2003, 2005) could be a productive enterprise.

The Affective Roots of Homophobia: The Semiotic Regulatory System as an Insightful Theoretical Model

(...) Being such a nuanced and fluid process, sexuality has a delicate yet powerful connection with the most vulnerable part of an individual—their feelings and emotions (...) Women and men emotionally construct their meanings and interpretations of sexuality. In this way, sexuality becomes the terrain wherein both the social and cultural and the subjective and personal embrace one another (...) (González-López 2005, p. 22).

According to the discussion presented in this paper, it is essential to construct a broader understanding of human beings beyond the simple description of “behaviours” in specific cultural contexts. To deal with this complex challenge it is necessary to find some general mechanism. From cultural psychology framework, that general mechanism is found in semiotic mediation. Signs operate in the development of individual *psyche*'s within a give society, as we all daily immerse ourselves in the invisible—yet functional—ocean of signs that surround us in our everyday worlds (Valsiner 2007, “General Conclusions”, p. 3–4).

However, our relating with the world is not just a rational enterprise mediated by signs. Beyond this conception, our relating to the world (and to ourselves) is affective embodiment (Madureira and Branco 2005b). So, *for psychology, affect, cognition and action form a whole and complex unit, and human beings are semiotically mediated*: “(...) the role of language-mediated relating with the world is not highest level in the semiotic mediation hierarchy—but an intermediate one (...)” (Valsiner 2003, p. 156).

⁵The concept of “non-hegemonic sexual identities” stresses the *centrality of power issues* when we analyze the diversity of sexual orientations in daily life. We are not referring to just “individual differences”, we are referring to issues with political and social implications.

In the semiotic regulatory system (see Valsiner 2003, 2005), the highest level (Level 4) is related with personal duties, values, and prejudices. At this level, the verbal referencing disappears, and in order to express their feelings, people have to return to Level 3. This is an example of a developmental model about the affective phenomena, therefore it is a dynamic model. The flow of experience is here considered. So, the hyper-generalized affective semiotic field (Level 4) is connected with, and hierarchically regulates, the other levels along the flow of personal experience, including the physiological level (Level 0).

The semiotic regulatory system is not an intra-psychological model constructed from an individualist conception of human beings. This model articulates three important levels of analysis: (a) macro social level (collective culture); (b) inter-psychological level (social interactions); and intra-psychological level (subjectivity). In this sense, it is interesting to note the Level 4—that of hyper-generalized affective semiotic fields—is often a major goal for canalization efforts. In this sense, for the promotion of generalization of feeling beyond the given here-and-now situation, specific activity contexts are used (Valsiner 2005).

In other words, we can see the efforts of social institutions (like school, family, law, religion etc.) in different societies to promote certain values, duties and prejudices, beyond the abstract notion of “right” and “wrong”. The collective cultural canalization of affects is an embodiment process with deep affective roots. In this sense, it is not an exaggeration to affirm that the individuals feel, including their physiological level (Level 0), the traces of the cultural and institutional practices throughout their lives.

For instance (see Fig. 3), the picture of a romantic kiss between two men can elicit a deep sensation of disgust (Level 0) in an individual who feels (and thinks) that heterosexual relationships are the only and exclusive possibility for a romantic relationship (Level 4).

The model presented above is a promising theoretical perspective for understanding the central role of affective fields in prejudices, especially in cases like homophobia. In this direction, it would be interesting to go back to the discussion about the tension between the general processes of *HEIMWEH* (know/security/“home road”) versus *FERNWEH* (unknown/insecurity/“far road”). These processes are significant for our purposes in this paper, include the proper notion of tension of opposite and its psychological implications. From the dialectical philosophical tradition, the notion of tension of opposites united within the same whole is a central notion. This notion is a productive analytical tool in the studies of meaning-making processes. According to Josephs and Valsiner (1998),

(...) We are capable of making up our mind—as well as changing it instantly—about different aspects of our present relation to the environment. We use a standard tool, human language, in ways that sometimes are quite nonstandard from a linguistic point of view (...) By such construction of meaning through language we can create our worries and our feelings of horror, as well as our hopes and our illusionary feelings of security. The process of such construction is referred to here as *meaning-making* (...) (p. 68).

(...) When a meaning emerges in the course of a person’s life in a here-and-now setting (e.g. ‘I am sad’, with *sad* as the emergent meaning), immediately and

LEVEL 4 OVER-GENERALIZED FEELING FIELD	I feel something... I cannot describe it clearly... but it makes me to feel like X [access at Level 3]	Values, duties, prejudices
		Disappearance of verbal referencing
LEVEL 3 GENERALIZED CATEGORIES OF FEELING	I feel discomfort and disgust	
LEVEL 2 SPECIFIC CATEGORIES OF EMOTIONS	Discomfort Disgust	
		Emergence of verbal referencing
LEVEL 1 GENERAL IMMEDIATE (FELLING TONE)		
		Differentiation of feelings based on physiological arousal
LEVEL 0 PHYSIOLOGICAL LEVEL (EXCITATION AND INHIBITION)		

Fig. 3 Model of semiotic regulatory system (after Valsiner 2005)

without reflection a fuzzy field of opposites emerges: all that could fit adequately into the field of *non-sad*. The generic form of such meaning complex is {A and non-A}; in our example, {sad and non-sad}. (p. 70).

It is important to note, from the quotations above, the meaning-making processes: (a) express the unit of cognition and affect; (b) relate to the flow of personal experiences; (c) the internal relational have to be in tension {A and non-A} to be transformed. The authors call *circumvention strategies* the semiotic organizers of relations between meaning complexes. At the inter and intra-psychological levels, the circumvention strategies change the results of thinking, actions and feelings.

In this sense, we can consider the *FERNWEH* process and *HEIMWEH* process as two opposite meaning complexes. These processes have a central role in many cultural psychological phenomena, include homophobia. The result of the tension between these opposing forces {A and non-A} expresses different circumvention strategies. For instance, Figs. 1 and 2 show the construction of a barrier [homophobia] between person A and person B, after person A discovers that person B is a gay/lesbian. In Fig. 4, we can see the tension between the *FERNWEH* process—called X—and the *HEIMWEH* process—called Y {non-X}. In this

example, the tension results in a complete blocking of X. In other words, the circumvention strategy presented in this example implies the elimination of *FERNWEH* process.

Obviously, Fig. 4 shows in a schematic way of one possibility of proceeding after person A discovers that person B is a gay/lesbian. There are many other possibilities, for example:

- (a) Person A has not had a gay/lesbian colleague before, he/she starts to feel a deep curiosity about person B's experiences (circumvention strategy: X became stronger than Y).
- (b) Person A starts to feel ambiguous feelings, a complex mix between curiosity and discomfort concerning person B (circumvention strategy: in some moments X is stronger than Y, in other moments Y is stronger than X).

PERSON A				PERSON B		
(1)	<p>HEIMWEH <> FERNWEH “home road” <> “far road” (Ernest Boesch)</p>] [] [<p>FERNWEH <> HEIMWEH “far road” <> “home road” (Ernest Boesch)</p>] [
(2)	PERSON A DISCOVERS	THAT		PERSON B IS A GAY/LESBIAN		
(3)			H O M O P H O B I A			
(4)				Person B does not know that person A knows about his/her sexual orientation		
(5)						
(6)	[X is blocked]					
	Y ←					
(7)	Person A feels discomfort relate to person B					

Fig. 4 Circumvention strategy: the *FERNWEH* process is blocked

- (c) Person A starts to feel curiosity about person B's experiences and desires to have homoerotic experiences too, however, these desires are completely unacceptable for person A. He/she starts to feel strong fear and anxiety related to person B (and their own homoerotic feelings). These extreme feelings of discomfort are expressed by the desire to eliminate the other, the "source" of these feelings [circumvention strategy: Y becomes much stronger than X, but this tension does not block X. This is a paradoxical circumvention strategy, because it is completely necessary to maintain X for Y becomes the strongest force].

It is essential to consider the relations between collective culture and personal culture, as mutually interdependent relations, but not reducible into one another (Valsiner 2005, 2007). In this sense, the person constructs his/her feelings, thoughts, desires and actions from the collective culture. For instance, sexual desires and practices are not an isolated dimension of human development, completely dissociated of cultural meanings and practices. As discussed before, there are strong connections between homophobia and sexism. According to our hypothesis, *the sexist meanings and practices present in collective culture are an important part of the social and subjective genesis of homophobia.*

An important step of the constant (re)production of sexism in our societies is the collective-cultural canalization of same-gender relations in daily life. This collective-cultural canalization is essential to construct rigid symbolic boundaries that constraint what mean to be "a man" ("non-woman") *versus* what mean to be "a woman" ("non-man"). However, the promotion of same-gender relations is inherently double: to promote closeness (FERNWEH process—"far road") towards the others of same-gender (i.e. friendships) is simultaneously marked by strong boundary, like: "this far you can go, *but not a step more!*". Especially this is the case of friendships among men (Andersen 2000).

It is central to note that this "stop here" signal is the boundary marker for action (and for desire?). This signal is an important example of constraint that activates the HEIMWEH process ("home road"), include the regulation of body contacts and expressions. For instance, some corporal expressions and physical contacts among men are allowed just in non-ordinary scenarios, like sports teams. Collective culture paradoxically promotes same-gender segregation of activities and spaces (i.e., bars for men; kitchen for women) and, at the same time, creates heterosexual boundaries in daily life. In few words: *by promoting same-gender segregation, sexism works against overcoming boundaries of homophobia. The more same-gender close, the more homophobia is generated.*

We can observe the sexism expressed in the dichotomy between activity and passivity. This dualistic gender view—femininity/sexual passive/the value of female virginity *versus* masculinity/sexual active/the value of diverse sexual experiences—is a relevant cultural reference that structures the meanings about sexuality in different contexts, like Latin American, Mediterranean, Middle Eastern, and North African societies (González-López 2005).

For instance, according to Brazilian popular culture, when a man has sex with another man, it is important to know: "Who is the passive? Who is the active?" The "active man" maintains his masculine status, but the "passive man" does not. He

loses his masculine status and starts to be considered like a “feminine man” (closer to women). From this sexist meaning system, the anti-model of masculinity is the “passive man”, and the anti-model of femininity is the “promiscuity (active) woman” (Parker 1991).

There are many pejorative popular words in Brazil for the “the passive man”, like “bicha” and “viado” (Parker 1991). It is important to note: “bicha” and “viado” do not express the same cultural meaning of the concept ‘homosexual’. While Brazilian popular words express a dualistic gender view, the concept of homosexuality comes from a foreign discourse imported from European medicine (18th and 19th centuries), and from ideas of ‘normality’ *versus* ‘abnormality’ (Foucault 1997).

As discussed previously, homophobia—as a *boundary phenomenon of affective meaning making and a collective historical-cultural construction*—should be analyzed from different levels (macro social, inter-psychological and intra-psychological levels). Therefore, it is important to develop our understanding about the intra-psychological level of homophobia in the cases of people who have homoerotic desires. For this discussion the dialogical self theory can help us.

The Dialogical Self and Homophobia

In contrast to other models of the self, like the componential self (collection of personality traits) and the static-structural self, the dialogical self is a dynamic theoretical model (Valsiner 2000). Beyond this important characteristic, the Dialogical self theory integrates cultural phenomena into the study of subjectivity. According to Hermans (2001),

Self and culture are conceived of in terms of multiplicity of positions among which dialogical relationships can development. This view, at the core of present issue, allows for the study of the self as ‘culture-inclusive’ and of culture as ‘self-inclusive’. At the same time, this conception avoids the pitfalls of treating the self as individualized and self-contained, and culture as abstract and reified (...) (Hermans 2001, p. 243).

Inspired by the work of William James (self) and Mikhail Bakhtin (dialogism), the Dialogical Self Theory (Hermans 2001, 2004) has developed an interesting model of understanding the self as an open and dynamic system of various I-positions. The self is conceived “(...) in terms of a dynamic multiplicity of relatively autonomous I-positions (...)” (Hermans 2001, p. 248).

The multiple I-positions are in continuous, permanent dialogues. However, these dialogues occur within a context of power struggle that takes diverse and numerous forms and levels. In other words, there is a complex “power game” (symmetry and asymmetry) between the different I-positions (Hermans 2001, 2004). Therefore, the self-system is not a “collection” of different I-positions, there are complex and dynamics relations between these diverse I-positions.

The relations between different I-positions provide a dynamic stability, essential for maintaining the development of the self-system as a whole. However, this dynamic stability is the result of the tension between stability and instability related to dialogicality processes of the system. Valsiner (2000) proposed a typology of

different dynamic forms of dialogicality. According to our objectives in this paper, it is interesting to analyze the processes of dominating and expropriating as examples of appropriating forms of dialogicality. What are dominating and expropriating processes?

The process of *dominating* entails the change in relationship between the parts of the self (...) The dominant-to-be voice subsumes its oppositional counterpart within the whole, overtaking the opposite and subordinating it.

An extreme version of such domination can be full *expropriation* of the opposing ‘voice’ (and its extinction). This leads to monologization of the dialogical self—a goal that is remarkably present for any social institution that attempts to capture the loyalties of the person through firm beliefs in ‘the right ways’ of being and acting (Valsiner 2000, p. 185—dialogical monologization). The basic meta-theoretical opposition in (and beyond) psychology of the self is that of the social demand for models of monological kinds (...) and the reality of dialogical processes within the constantly self-constructing person (Valsiner 2000, p. 9).

In one of the examples presented previously: “Person A starts to feel curiosity about person B’s experiences and desires to have homoerotic experiences too, however, these desires are completely unacceptable for person A (...)” (circumvention strategies—see example c). Concerning the intra-psychological level of analysis, we can construct two hypotheses from this example:

- *Dominating process*—The I-position X (i.e. traditional and religious I) subordinates the I-position Y (i.e. his/her personal homoerotic desires). In this case, person A may have a fuzzy awareness about the source of his/her anxiety and fear—his/her sexual desires—but they are completely non acceptable. He/she can access at Level 3 (generalized categories of feeling).
- (b) *Expropriation process*—The I-position X (i.e. traditional and religious I) expropriates the I-position Y (i.e. his/her personal homoerotic desires). In this case, person A may have not be conscious about the source of his/her anxiety and fear—his/her sexual desires. For person A, the source of his/her deep feelings of discomfort is person B and his/her homoerotic desires and completely non-acceptable practices. Person A cannot access at level 3 (generalized categories of feeling). This level was blocked.

The deep values (Level 4) present a central role on the sense of continuity of self-system along the individual life. However, we consider the deep values as an important principle conducting the flow of experiences, not as a static structure (Branco and Madureira 2004). When the values system of a person is direct attacked, especially when we consider the deep values, the HEIMWEH process (“home road”) tend to be promoted. Therefore, in the cases of people who have homoerotic desires, the homophobia, as a cultural barrier, has deep implications in terms of psychological suffering (anxiety, depression, fear, guilt, shame etc.).

It is central to remember that the Level 4—hyper-generalized affective semiotic field—is, many times, the major target for the cultural canalization efforts of social institutions (Valsiner 2005). In this direction, there are strong, explicit and,

constantly, implicit connections between the social demand for monological models of the self, the (re)production of prejudices (like homophobia) and values according to hegemonic social norms.

Last but not least, the maintaining of social control mechanisms depends on individuals that “embody” these prejudices and values. These individuals whose acting, thinking, feeling, desiring are on “right ways”, without deeply reflecting on what this means. When we intend to construct strategies against prejudice in general, and homophobia in particular, one of the most important challenge is “unblocking” the Level 3. Sincere reflections on our prejudices are an important step...

An Empirical Example: Homophobia and the Construction of Symbolic Boundaries Relate to Friendship

The construction of non-hegemonic sexual identities was the subject of qualitative research accomplished in Brasília—Brazil (Madureira 2000). Individual semi-structured interviews were carried out with ten young adults (six males and four females), from 20 to 34 years old, who acknowledged having a sexual orientation other than heterosexual. This research was inspired by the broader question: how did the interviewees make sense of their sexual identities? In the beginning, a preliminary analysis was completed of all interviews. Therefore, six interviews were selected and then analyzed in a deeper way.

In the context of this paper, some extracts of one interview will be presented. The objective is to illustrate some theoretical ideas about homophobia as presented above. More precisely, the construction of symbolic boundaries related to friendship.

Interviewee: Robert (fictitious name, 25 years old)

The participant stresses that he has heterosexual and homosexual friends, distinctly other people who share the same sexual orientation of him. However, he has never talked about his own sexual orientation to his heterosexual friends. According to Robert, his sexual orientation (bisexuality) is a “small detail” in his life, a [apparent] dissociated aspect of his social relations. Beyond that, he is afraid he would lose his friends if his sexual orientation were to become explicit.

“In my case, for example, I cannot do this, I am surely that if I *mix*...the two groups, it will be very complicated (laughter—Robert), you know. I will lose many hetero friends, and I will lose many gay friends. So...I follow the division. I do not stop interacting with one group and I do not stop interacting with the other group, you know”.⁶ (lines 639–643).

“Although, sometimes, I have had the desire to tell, I thought it would be better not to...you do not know how the person will react, you will endanger one

⁶In the original:

“Meu caso, por exemplo, eu já não posso fazer isso, eu tenho certeza que se eu *misturar*...os dois, não vai dar certo (risos – Robert), entendeu. Eu, com certeza, vou perder muitos amigos heteros, como vou perder muitos amigos gays. Então...é...eu segui na divisão. Eu não deixo de conviver com um, como não deixo de conviver com outro, entendeu.” (linhas 639–643).

friendship for millions of years through one a small detail or another small detail, I think it is not important. If *there is a necessity*, I will tell, but if there is not, I think I will not...there is no motive. I do not feel pressure from *them* related to a girlfriend, for example. So there is no need to tell.” (lines 1061–1066)⁷

The participant constructed symbolic boundaries that divide his friendships in two different groups by sexual orientation: (a) non-heterosexual friends and (b) heterosexual friends. It is interesting to note that he uses concrete strategies in his daily life to maintain these symbolic boundaries. For instance, he invited these two groups for a party in his home and he told non-heterosexual friends: “the people over there do not know, *I want to continue like this*”.

“(…) I have already introduced one friend... gay to one hetero friend, but they do not know about each other, you know, you introduce those who are not *explicit*, as people say, those do not attract much attention (...) So, there is a division, I *already had a party in my home* and I invited the two groups, *without any problem*, one group did not suspect the other, I want to say, you explain before: well... generally to gays, to hetero people you do not need to talk... the people over there do not know, *I want to continue like this* (...) (lines 649–652 and lines 656–659).⁸

Therefore, even though the two groups are present in the same place, even though they are sharing the same concrete situation (like a party), there are always symbolic boundaries that divide these social interactions and the sexual orientation is a central criteria. The constant maintenance of these symbolic boundaries appears to be a cause of anxiety in his daily life. The fear related to being discovered as a “non-heterosexual person” was expressed in different moments of his interview.

It is interesting to go back to Fig. 4. Now, we can complete Fig. 4 with one possibility related to Person B (steps 5 to 7) from the empirical example just presented on this topic. In the case of Robert, we may suppose he feels ambiguous related to his heterosexual friends. He does not want to lose those friendships, but he has fear that his heterosexual friends discover his own sexual orientation. In other

⁷In the original:

“Mas que já tive vontade algumas vezes de contar, eu achei melhor não...você não sabe como é que a pessoa vai reagir, você vai arriscar uma amizade, assim de milhões de anos, por causa de um detalhezinho ou outro, acho que não tem importância. Se houver *necessidade*, eu até conto, mas não havendo, acho que não...não tem porquê. Eu não sinto pressão *deles* em relação à namorada, a qualquer esse tipo de coisa, então, não há necessidade de contar.” (linhas 1061–1066).

⁸“(…) eu já apresentei amigo...é...gay meu pra amigo hetero meu, mas sem nenhum saber que um é e o outro é, entendeu, você apresenta aqueles que não dão muita *pinta*, como dizem, né, que não chamam muita atenção (...) Então, dá divisão, já *fiz festa em casa* que eu chamei os dois, *sem o menor problema*, nenhum desconfiou do outro, quer dizer, você dá um toque antes, né: olha... geralmente pros gays, pros heteros não precisa avisar, ó...o pessoal que tá lá *não sabe, quero que continue assim* (...) (linhas 649–652 e linhas 656–659).

words, we can observe the tension between: {to be close} *versus* {to be non-close} (circumvention strategy: in some moments X is stronger than Y, in other moments Y is stronger than X). This ambiguity resulting from the tension between the *FERNWEH* process and the *HEIMWEH* process may promote feelings of discomfort in the case of Robert.

The fear of being discriminated against, in different levels and intensities, is a common theme in all of the interviews (Madureira 2000). Therefore, all participants have to develop (personal and/or collective) strategies to deal with the prejudice against homoerotic orientations in their daily life. These strategies include, for example, the construction of symbolic boundaries related to friendships, family and social interaction in a broader sense.

The feelings of discomfort (such as fear and anxiety) of people that present non-hegemonic sexual identities are completely understandable in the context of homophobic societies. At the same time, these feelings of discomfort contribute to maintaining the boundaries between the “heterosexual world” and the “GLTB world”. It is possible to perceive a paradoxical situation. The transgression of these boundaries implies risks for the “transgressor” (to suffer discriminatory practices) who decides to openly express his/her sexual orientation. But it also implies opportunities for social change, to overcome homophobia, especially on the inter-psychological level of analysis.

General Conclusions: Some Implications

The principal motivation for this study was to contribute to the solution of a problem: the presence of homophobia in our societies. Construction of strategies against this problem in our social institutions, in our daily life interactions is essential to developing our understanding about homophobia. As a complex subject, homophobia should be considered from different levels of analysis: (a) macro social level (collective culture); (b) inter-psychological level (social interactions); (c) intra-psychological level (subjectivity).

After the presentation of the theoretical analysis and the empirical example, it is possible to present some implications of this study. The first implication is the importance of integrating the strategies against sexism and the strategies against homophobia. As discussed in this article, by promoting same-gender segregation, sexism works against overcoming boundaries of homophobia. The more same-gender close, the more homophobia is generated. Therefore, there are important interfaces between the feminist movement and the GLTB movement. Beyond these social and political movements, it is necessary to promote more research about these issues (sexism and homophobia), and also promote democratic dialogue between the scientific communities and the diverse communities present in our societies (for instance, the education community).

The second important implication is to consider the deep affective roots of prejudice in general, and homophobia in particular. Therefore, the creation of strategies to deal with the centrality of affective aspects of homophobia is fundamental. An important step in this direction is to recognize the marks of

homophobia in our selves and to create an open space to discuss this issue in different social contexts, “unblocking” the Level 3.

The third implication is related to the interesting “dance” between the general and the particular. Cultural psychology can help us to construct a broader understanding about psychological phenomena, and also to understand the specific cultural meanings associated with the phenomena in question.

For instance, in Brazil today, there are many changes related to gender and sexuality issues. The social and political movements—such as Brazilian feminism and GLTB movement—and the recent public policies related to these issues underline individual /citizen rights, and the value of diversity for the construction of a real democratic society. However, social movements, public policies and laws are examples of impersonal discourses about the individual rights of the GLTB population in a country where the personal and public boundaries are not so clear, where commitments to families’ and friends’ values are more important than the abstract meaning of ‘individual’ rights (DaMatta 1987).

Therefore, it is necessary to articulate diverse strategies against homophobia and consider the specificities of the different cultural contexts. At the same time, it is necessary to understand the general principles underlying homophobia. This is a special contribution of cultural psychology: to create new knowledge from the tension between the general and the particular. This tension can be useful in the fight against homophobia...

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