

# Experts seek clues to cause of bashing

(AP) — Michelangelo Signorile was nine years old when his ears first burned with the jeers "sissy" and "oueer" from his New York schoolmates. Scared the taunts were true, he turned his fear and fury on other outcast boys.

"I became a queer-basher to prove I wasn't queer," Signorile writes in his book, *Queer in America*. "You'd make sure to do it in front of everyone ... to show everyone else you were macho," Signorile said, describing how he punched and pummelled his victims. "But I think also it was showing yourself."

Eventually, Signorile, a 32-year-old writer best known for "outing" famous but closeted gays, accepted that he was gay.

But until the age of 17, the threat of ostracism and fright at his budding homosexuality turned Signorile into a schoolyard gay basher — two reasons among many that psychologists offer to explain anti-gay violence.

Research into such violence is as scant as reports of the incidents themselves. What informs the experts is a mix of observation, experience, educated assumptions and common sense.

Gregory M. Herek, a social psychologist at the University of California at Davis widely ranked as the nation's leading expert on anti-gay violence, describes a knot of reasons that homosexuals are targeted.

The clots of young men who visit gay neighborhoods to pounce on homosexuals may hope to prove they belong in their peer group of "real men."

Those who target lesbians feel affronted by women who don't appear to need men, even as objects of sexual desire.

In a society inured and secretly — and not always secretly — excited by violence, the roughing up of homosexuals may seem appropriate.

Gay bashers may be acting on sexual confusion, unsettled by any attraction to their own sex and lacking understanding about sexuality.

Among young men, especially, there's a strong need to prove themselves and to forge bonds, Herek said.

"The teens and early 20s is a time of identity consolidation, struggling with issues of manhood and masculinity, how one becomes a man," he said. "By attacking a gay man or a lesbian, these guys are trying symbolically to affirm their manhood."

Gay bashing can be a way of expressing values, Herek said. "Like saying 'I'm a good person, I adhere to these values. I'm a good Christian, homosexuality is the devil and I'm going to attack this,'" he said.

Plain old xenophobia, fear of strangers, may also be at work. "The fact that (homosexuality) is uncommon, and therefore it's strange, and if you, yourself ... get a little excitement out of a same-sex person, this could be upsetting," said Ray Bixler, psychology professor emeritus at the University of Louisville, an expert on gender differences in behavior.

Under the tangle of feelings that ignite gay bashers lies a hatred of women, suggests Matthew Weissman, a psychologist in Washington, D.C.

"We are a culture that fears and despises the feminine aspect of character," Weissman said. The sticky stereotype of women as passive and weak gets attached to gay men, he said.

"I think for a lot of straight people, when they think a gay man may let himself be penetrated, it opens up fears among men about passive desires."

# Gay bashing incidents on rise

(AP) — It happens all of the time in Ron Cayot's neighborhood in Chicago, a gay enclave called Lake View. A car full of kids pulls up and asks directions. Their unwary victim bends down to answer.

"And all of a sudden somebody's fist will come out and hit the guy in the face, and they'll drive away laughing," said Cayot, a disabled 39-year-old carpenter whose voice is a choked rasp.

The threat of violence is the other longtime companion of gay men and women. Widely assumed to be underreported, the casebook of anti-gay killings and assaults is a numbing descent into cruelty.

It happened to Cayot. Three young men just pulled up beside him and a friend one night, and yelled "Faggot!" and, after a scuffle, "Aiming!"

Then the gun spoke, three times, tearing open his neck, piercing his abdomen and lodging a bullet in his shoulder.

It would be months after the March 31, 1992, attack before Cayot could speak again, even eat again on his own. He still can't work, and his left arm, the one he writes with, is numb. A series of operations has left him with more than a million dollars in hospital bills he can't pay.

His assailants remain at large. "They think that gay people are weak, they think that we're all 'pansies' and that it's a real easy target," Cayot said.

So they target them, again and again.

On Feb. 9, a mugging in Hartford, Conn., turned into a rape when two brothers asked a man if he was gay and he said yes. That same night, in Madison, Wis., a gay man was punched, choked and kicked while an assailant screamed: "I hate faggots!"

The list of the victims is unending: Allen Schindler, his skull smashed against a toilet in Japan until the gay American sailor's body was unrecognizable to his mother; Ana Maria Rosales, shot in the face on Jan. 7 in Washington, D.C., as she left a bar holding hands with another woman.

A witness told police Rosales' assailant demanded: "What's wrong with you, girl?" then said he intended to have sex with her, and then killed her. A grand jury decided hatred of lesbians was at least a partial motive for defendant Gregory White, now awaiting trial.

Anti-gay violence is markedly demeaning and vicious; some say it's the last permitted hate crime, and it is happening more and more often.

"We're in a period of increased acceptance and empowerment (of gays) on the one hand, and increased backlash on the other," said Kevin Berrill, a consultant in Washington, D.C., who 11 years ago began the first systematic recording of anti-gay violence for the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

"Anytime a persecuted, disempowered group agitates for equality, there is a backlash, we've seen that over and over again in our nation's history."

Once self-concealed, afraid of scandal and rejection, homosexuals suddenly seem to be all over the place.

They hold gay pride picnics in city parks. They

**'They think that gay people are weak, they think that we're all 'pansies' and that it's a real easy target.'**

— Ron Cayot,  
Gay bashing victim

march on Washington. They demand representation on city councils and in Congress. They go on talk shows and hold hands in public. They let it be known that the person they keep house with is not of the opposite sex.

They become the subject of scrutiny, whether the topic is AIDS, gay rights, cries of evil from conservatives or the welcome of the Clinton administration — which installed lesbian Roberta Achtenberg as an assistant secretary in the Department of Housing and Urban Development while pushing to lift the ban on gays in the military.

Tying this directly to violence is only a hunch, however. The figures are meager.

It's widely assumed, by people who work with victims of such violence and those who track it, that much more occurs than gets reported. Victims fear hostile or disinterested police. They may encounter prosecutors wary of the vagueries of hate crime that make it hard to prove.

So what gets most notice is the bloodiest street violence, the worst attacks outside gay bars or in neighborhoods or other areas frequented by gays.

"We end up talking about street violence (because) it's the only place where we have data. It looks more like a crime," said Gregory Herek, a social psychologist at the University of California at Davis widely considered the pre-eminent researcher into anti-gay prejudice and violence.

"We have evidence there is an iceberg out there," Herek added. "We see the tip of that iceberg in lesbian and gay street youth who frequently flee to large cities to escape violence in their homes and in their schools."

The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, seeking a consistent measure of a little reported crime, takes a five-city survey of agencies that aid victims of anti-gay violence. It totaled up 817 incidents of anti-gay assaults in 1992, up from 775 the year before. Slayings attributed to homophobia jumped from eight in 1991 to 12 last year, the task force said.

"The continuing rise, particularly in cities with long-established victims services, indicates to us it is not just increasing awareness, but increasing incidence of hate violence," said Martin Hiraga, director of the task force's Anti-Violence Project.

A particular feature of anti-gay assaults, Hiraga said, is that it commonly begins with insults that rapidly escalate.

Until recently, gay bashing wasn't even a specific crime. In many places it's still not officially a motive for assault; only 21 states and the District of Columbia include sexual orientation in their hate crimes laws.

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