

sexual preference. The *nkhonsthana*, boy-wife, "used to satisfy the lust" of the *nima*, husband, received a wedding feast, and his elder brother received brideprice. Junod mentioned that some of the "boys" were older than 20, and also described a transvestitic dance, *tinkonsthana*, in which the *nkhontshana* donned wooden breasts, which they would only remove when paid to do so by their *nima*.

*Female Homosexuality.* Controversy continues about the purported chastity of woman/woman marriage in three East African and one West African culture. Other mentions of lesbian sex from the East Coast of Africa include discussion of a woman's dance, *lelemama*, in Mombassa, Kenya (which variously serves as a cover for adultery, prostitution, and recruitment into lesbian networks without the husband's knowledge) and the *wasaga* (grinders) of Oman. An Ovimbundu (in Angola) informant, told an ethnographer, "There are men who want men, and women who want women. . . . A woman has been known to make an artificial penis for use with another woman." Such practices did not meet with approval, but neither did transvestic homosexuals of either sex desist. Among the Tswana (in addition to homosexuality among the men laboring in the mines), it was reported that back home, "lesbian practices are apparently fairly common among the older girls and young women, without being regarded in any way reprehensible." Use of artificial penises was also reported among the Ila and Naman tribes of South Africa. Among the much-discussed Azande of the Sudan, sisters who are married/retained by brothers were reported to have a reputation for lesbian practices.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY.** Fremont E. Besmer, *Horses, Musicians, and Gods*, South Hadley, MA: Bergin & Garvey, 1983; E. E. Evans-Pritchard, "Sexual Inversion Among the Azande," *American Anthropologist*, 72 (1970), 1428-34; Melville Herskovits, *Dahomey*, New York: Augustine, 1937; Henry Junod, *Life of a South African Tribe*, London:

Macmillan, 1927; S. F. Nadel, *The Nuba*, London: Oxford University Press, 1947; idem, "Two Nuba Religions," *American Anthropologist*, 57 (1955), 661-79; Günter Tessmann, *Die Pangwe*, Berlin: Wasmuth, 1913.

Stephen O. Murray

## AFRICAN-AMERICANS

See *Black Gay Americans*.

## AGEISM

This new term encompasses a cluster of attitudes that have become increasingly common in modern industrial societies. Ageism is prejudice of young people against the old expressed in the perpetuation of stereotypes; ridicule and avoidance of older people; and neglect of their social and health needs. Such attitudes frequently appear among male homosexuals, much less among lesbians. The word ageism, which came into use about 1970, is modeled on the older terms racism and sexism.

*Cultural Analogues.* The ancient Greeks divided the course of human life into stages, the simplest scheme being one that still lingers: childhood, maturity, and old age. Although one may assign precise boundaries to these stages—and add intermediate ones such as adolescence that may seem needed—age may also be viewed relatively and subjectively. A youth of 21 may regard someone who is 38 as old, while the latter considers himself still young.

Tribal cultures and traditional societies usually valued age as a repository of experience. This custom of honoring the elderly balanced the tendency, found among males through most of the world, to experience sexual attraction toward younger people. In an era in our own society when social security income was not yet the rule, the younger, productive members of a family acknowledged a duty to look after elderly retirees. Now younger people, with the assurance that their parents are provided for economically, often

feel free to neglect them socially. Another factor upsetting the traditional balance is the fact that the virtues of youth itself came to be idealized and celebrated, beginning in the nineteenth century. Thus in 1832 Giuseppe Mazzini (1805–1872) rallied his supporters in the campaign for Italian independence under the banner of *Giovane Italia* (Young Italy). Hence Young Ireland, Young Poland, the Young Turks, and so forth. At the turn of the century innovative artists in Germany created the *Jugendstil* (literally "Youth Style"; a variant of art nouveau), while Russian painters formed the Union of Youth, echoing the title of a play by Hendrik Ibsen (*De unges forbund* [The League of Youth]; 1869). Increasingly, youth was identified with political change and artistic innovation, and journalists habitually contrasted its energy with the inertia of the old fogies. Beginning at the end of the nineteenth century, the enormous growth of interest in competitive athletics made young bodies the image of strength and accomplishment, a notion relentlessly promoted by Madison Avenue in the interests of consumerism. In a period of rapid social change youth became synonymous with progress, age with reaction.

*Homosexual Aspects.* The youth cult among homosexuals has deep roots. In classical Greek *pederasty*, the characteristic dyad was an adult man and an adolescent. Yet this youth-age nexus is less significant for the origins of ageism than it seems, because in such couples the relative (though temporary) inferiority of the boy partner was always recognized. It was precisely to promote his education and training in manly virtues that the relationship existed. In *pederasty* the youth was not an equal partner, when he became so, the liaison ended. With the rise of *androphilia* (homosexual unions of two adults) in Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, this pattern shifted, for both partners were adults in the sense that both had attained puberty. But age differentials did not vanish. A glance at the

*advertisements* (personals columns) of today's gay press will show that most gay men seek younger partners. Indeed the advertisers often place an upper limit—40, 30 or even as low as 21 years of age—on partners they are willing to accept. Gay slang stigmatizes older men as "aunties," "dogs," "toads," and "trolls," who congregate in "wrinkle rooms."

Eroticization of youth produces various secondary manifestations among gay men: preference for youthful clothing styles; adhesion to the latest trends in pop music; dieting and exercising so as to maintain a slim body; and adoption of voguish hair styles, including bleaching to keep a boy's towhead look. Indisputably, the erotic imagination of the gay male community privileges youth; gerontophilia, attraction to older men, is relatively rare. This pattern of preference contrasts with that of the lesbian community where older persons are more likely to be prized. The difference between gay men and lesbians may mirror that of the larger (heterosexual) society, where older men typically marry younger women.

In the 1960s and 70s the cult of youth that had long flourished in the gay male community was reinforced through symbiosis with the *Counterculture*. As a mass movement the Counterculture was made possible by post-World War II prosperity, which gave younger people a disposable income in amounts that could only be dreamed of by their forerunners. The confidence born of such newfound economic power, and the reaction against rule by the old that was perceived as tolerating racism and war, led to open proclamations of ageist prejudice, witness the slogan "Don't trust anyone over thirty."

As a result of the confluence of all these factors, psychological counselors report seeing gay men, some as early as their mid-thirties, who have internalized ageism, regarding themselves "as over the hill." As would be expected, this subjective phenomenon of "accelerated ageing" is not common among lesbians, though it

is found among heterosexual women, who are subjected to a barrage of commercial messages for products that purport to keep them looking young.

The negative effects of ageism have not been ignored in today's gay community. In the 1980s some younger gay men and women, recognizing that in due course old age awaits them as well, joined such social organizations as San Francisco's GLOE (Gay and Lesbian Outreach to Elders) and New York's SAGE (Senior Action in a Gay Environment), in order to befriend and assist older people. Over the years gay churches and synagogues have also done much to achieve interaction of people of various age groups.

Wayne R. Dynes

## AGING

Gerontology, the social science of aging, began well before World War II, experienced rapid growth after the war, and has recently become a major field, as an ever larger proportion of the population reaches sixty. For many years, gerontological research assumed that all older people were heterosexual, even though upwards of three million North Americans over sixty are lesbian or gay. This scientific blindness was hardly accidental. The social science of "deviant behavior" knew that older homosexuals existed, but it propagated the myth that "old aunties" and "aging dykes" lived lonely, miserable lives, shunned by a homosexual subculture obsessed with youth. Not until the year of Stonewall (1969) did Martin Weinberg publish the first study showing that homosexuals adjust well to age. Only in the late 1980s did gay gerontology become established as a field of research.

A major theme of gay liberation, as of black liberation and feminism, was a new positive emphasis ("gay pride") which pushed the pendulum of gay gerontology to the opposite extreme. Some research in the 1970s argued that homosexuals actually enjoyed "advantages" over heterosexu-

als, in adjusting to midlife and old age. More recently, a middle position has been taken: homosexuals obviously differ in some aspects of aging, but on such key issues as psychological health, income, friendships, satisfaction with life they do not differ significantly from heterosexuals (Brecher; Lee).

This article supports the middle position—that homosexual elders are no less likely to live happy, healthy and comfortable lives than their nongay neighbors. The focus is on interesting aspects of contemporary homosexual aging, especially those which provide generally useful insights, whatever the person's sexual orientation.

*Accelerated Aging.* For many years it was argued that homosexuals experienced the effects of aging sooner than nongays. Homosexual culture was considered "obsessed with youth," thus the loss of youthful appearance made thirty the threshold of "middle age." Recent studies indicate that most homosexuals do not feel or act older at 30 or 40 than their nongay peers. However, they do think that *other* homosexuals view them and treat them as if they were further advanced in age. Thus, while feeling young and active at 40, homosexuals may lie about their age because they fear other homosexuals consider 40 "over the hill." It appears that homosexuals still suffer a mutual misunderstanding, rather like that of a male teenage virgin who lies about his sexual conquests because he concludes from his peers' boasts that they are already sexually experienced.

*Earlier Socialization and Later Adjustment to Aging.* A young person "growing up gay" faces much the same learning tasks as a nongay classmate, but there is an essential difference, which the gay youth has in common with other minority groups: how to handle stigmatized status. Unlike most minority stigmas, the young homosexual can decide to remain secret ("in the closet") yet enter a subculture ("the gay world") which pro-