

Curtis M. Kularski

Dr. Trela Anderson

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Discrimination and Social Exclusion of Homosexuals

For the history of modern society various groups have been targeted as victims of discrimination, whether because of the color of their skin, their religious heritage or their sexual orientation. Individuals do not generally respond favorably to people that they perceive as being different from themselves. Homosexuality should not be treated as a deviant condition in society, and homosexuals should instead be granted the same rights that are afforded to heterosexuals.

Groups that classify homosexuals as deviants argue that homosexuality is immoral, unnatural and a threat to traditional masculinity. As a result of the perceived threat and difference between the majority group, the heterosexuals, and the minority group, the homosexuals, homosexuals have been placed into the category of being a sub-culture and in some areas, a counterculture. The belief of homosexuality as deviant is not only present in society, but it is reinforced by popular culture references. According to Stephens (22), a culturally significant rapper who uses the name 'Eminem', has frequent "explicit use of epithets such as 'faggot' and 'lez' in his lyrics". This derogatory language conveys distrust and perhaps a hatred of homosexuals. Eminem is just one of many that use what Anderson refers to as "hip-hop rhetoric" (22). Another major source of negativity toward homosexuals comes from religious

establishments. Britton says "Western Christian theology condemns homosexuality as a sin" and "rejection of homosexuality is an integral part of the American Christian heritage" (424). Since the United States was founded on religious freedom and a separation of church and state, it does not make sense for standards for behavior to be based on the opinions of a single dominant religion, or any religion for that matter. The cultural view of homosexuality is contaminated with religious doctrine and messages of media and entertainment that unfairly give a biased view of homosexuality to the general population.

Often in the history of discrimination the majority group finds justification for the way they treat the minority. The conflict between heterosexuals and homosexuals is no exception. American colonists justified the existence of a slave trade through religion, specifically Christian biblical passages of Genesis (Pagden). Similar religious references have been used to defend the discrimination against homosexuals (Ward 495). According to Ward, "scripture is often the cornerstone of homophobia" (495). Religion and science are intellectually very far from each other. Religious beliefs cannot be scientifically tested for validity, and religious texts are open to a variety of interpretations. Based on the beliefs of the colonists, blacks were stripped of all rights and often treated inhumanely (Pagden). Homosexuals are presently denied the right to have families in many locations. According to Edwards, that is because marriage is an institution that the heterosexual majority has reserved for itself, and not the homosexual minority, which they perceive to be unnatural (247). The belief that marriage is a sacred institution that homosexuals are not deserving of is a discriminatory view that hinders social growth and prevents the natural evolution of the social institution. Beyond the legal restrictions imposed on homosexuals by governments, there are certain social sanctions that are in effect for homosexuals in general society. Depending on the area, homosexuals may find disapproving

looks, verbal insults or physical assaults as the result of practicing public displays of affection toward their partner. The social discrimination against homosexuals is rampant, especially in conservative Christian communities. Religion is not a good source for social policy concerning the treatment of minorities and what rights they should be granted. To deny any group rights that are given to others is unethical as it represents an attempt to disenfranchise one group for the benefit of another.

One of the key concerns that occur in discussions about homosexuality is its impact on the definition of masculinity. Some individuals hold that the existence of homosexuality endangers masculinity (Ward 496). Ward states that masculinity involves: "a degree of mastery over one's environment, the display of avid interest in sports, competitiveness, independence, being strong/tough, suppressing feelings, and aggressive/dominant control of relationships" (496). There are no criteria in that set which homosexuals cannot have, or which homosexuality is genuinely a threat. The fear comes from a perception that men who do not seek women are in some way lesser males. According to Brittan, homophobia has been defined as the irrational fear of homosexuals (425). Britton also presents the idea that the fear may arise from the boundary between social and sexual interaction for males (426). Most heterosexual males engage almost exclusively in homosocial behavior. When that homosocial behavior is combined with the concept of homosexuality there is vulnerability for some men, as they think of their homosocial behavior as a secure environment that is not combined with sexuality (Britton 426). This vulnerability is established based on the general attitudes of masculinity, which require males to always compete with each other and strive to prove their masculinity (Ward 496). Through constantly defending their own masculinity the male never develops confidence in his

masculinity, and instead becomes locked into a cycle of continuously attempting to strive for a hegemonic standard of masculinity that he may or may not be able to achieve.

Over time the definition of "family" has evolved. The standard ideal of the nuclear family is deeply rooted in American culture, but in 68% of families, that ideal is not a reality (Laszloffy 207). Through hegemonic masculinity and standardized gender roles for females, society has limited the definition of family to eliminate variety in the family experience and create a family model that is ultimately unsatisfying for all individuals concerned. The expectation that females take care of children and males function as providers denies females the ability to expand the scope of their existence beyond home, and limits the amount of interaction that males have with their children. This confined thinking is limiting in terms of heterosexual couples, but is disastrous for homosexual couples, as in many states homosexuals are denied the right to adopt children or in any way form a family. The stay-at-home mother and provider father roles are slowly changing as a result of feminist movements (Connell 735).

Current trends in society encourage discrimination against homosexuals. Those trends are fueled by media images, religious doctrine and a hyper-masculine fear of homosexual emasculation. Homosexuals are not a threat to society and as such should not be treated as deviants and should be allowed the same rights as heterosexuals.

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