

SECTION 6

HETEROSEXISM

Introduction

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Oppression directed against all females, lesbians, gay males, bisexuals, transgender people, and intersexuals' goes by many names and definitions. What connects them is the socially constructed and enforced binary systems that divide people into either/or gender or sexual categories based upon societal norms of self-presentation. The socially constructed notions of "sex," "gender," and "sexuality" are organized and maintained through oppositional binary frames with their attendant meanings, social roles, values, stereotypes, behavioral and attitudinal imperatives, expressions, and expectations. These features serve to maintain power and privilege for those who accord with these norms, while marginalizing and disempowering groups and individuals who violate them. This structure is established and enforced on the societal, institutional, and individual/interpersonal levels (see selection 4 for elaboration of this framework). The most extreme and overt forms of oppression are directed against those who most directly challenge, confound, or contest these binary frames.

This section should be read in the context of the preceding section on sexism and the following section on transgender oppression. These three sections, taken together, present a comprehensive view of the ways in which societal privileges and disadvantages follow socially constructed understandings of the roles and expressions that attach to sex, gender, and sexuality. The section website provides further resources to explore and understand these three interrelated yet distinctive components of sex, gender, and sexuality.

HETEROSEXISM DEFINED

I define *heterosexism* as the overarching system of advantages bestowed on heterosexuals, based on the institutionalization of heterosexual norms or standards that privilege heterosexuals and heterosexuality, and exclude the needs, concerns, cultures, and life experiences of lesbians, gay males, and bisexuals. Often overt, though at times subtle, heterosexism is oppression by neglect, omission, erasure, and distortion. A related concept is *heteronormativity* (Warner 1991) and *compulsory heterosexuality* (Rich 1986), which emphasizes the normalization and privileging of heterosexuality on the personal/interpersonal, institutional, and societal levels.

Examples of heterosexism include parents who automatically expect their children to marry a person of the other sex; media portrayals of only heterosexuals in positive and satisfying relationships; teachers presuming that all of their students are heterosexual, and teaching only about the

contributions of heterosexuals. Heterosexism also takes the form of pity toward lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) people as unfortunate human beings who “can’t help being the way they are.”

Heterosexism’s more active and visible component, called *homophobia*, is oppression by intent, purpose, and design. Derived from the Greek terms *homos*, meaning “same,” and *phobikos*, meaning “having a fear of and/or an aversion toward,” *homophobia* refers to the fear and hatred of those who love or are attracted emotionally and sexually to people of the same sex. Homophobia includes prejudice, discrimination, harassment, and acts of violence brought on by that fear and hatred. Related concepts include *lesbophobia* or *lesbiphobia*, which can be defined as the fear, hatred, discrimination, and acts of violence directed against women who love women, and *biphobia*, which is fear, hatred, and oppression directed against bisexuals: people who love and are emotionally and sexually attracted to people of other sexes. For the purposes of this section, *heterosexism* is a more inclusive and expansive term than terms based on a “phobia” meaning a fear that is “irrational” or “unreasonable.” This section takes the view that some fears and hatreds (and forms of prejudice) are *taught* as a normalized process of socialization (see selection 6) and thus exist within the realm of *learned* responses. Therefore, for purposes of discussion throughout this book and this section, though we sometimes use the terms “homophobia” and “biphobia,” we are also employing the term “heterosexism” in its expanded and inclusive form.

Heterosexism forces LGB people to struggle constantly against their own invisibility, and makes it much more difficult for them to integrate a positive identity. LGB people themselves often find it difficult not to internalize society’s negative notions of homosexuality and bisexuality. Internalized oppression, in this instance heterosexism, can be defined as the internalization, consciously or unconsciously, of external attitudes, myths, and stereotypes of inferiority, inadequacy, self-hatred, and sense of “otherness” by the targets of systematic oppression, here lesbians, gay males, and bisexuals. Internalizing these external negative societal messages is not our fault, for we too have been socialized within the systemic framework of heterosexism. There are, however, steps we can take to reduce, or even eliminate, internalized oppression, though working to end internalized oppression can be an extensive process.

OPPRESSION AND LIBERATION FRAMEWORKS

The history of homosexuality and bisexuality includes incredible pain and enormous pride, overwhelming repression and victorious rejoicing, stifling invisibility and dazzling illumination. Throughout the ages, homosexuality and bisexuality have been called many things: from “sin,” “sickness,” and “crime,” to “orientation,” “identity,” and even “a gift from God.” Though same-sex behavior has probably always existed in human and most non-human species, the concept of “homosexuality,” “bisexuality,” and “heterosexuality,” in fact sexual orientation in general, is a relatively modern Western concept. Because the notion of sexual orientation is relatively new, the construction of an identity and sense of community based on these identities is also relatively recent.

RELIGIOUS ENDORSEMENTS FOR HETEROSEXUALITY

Many people cite religious texts to support the social norms of heterosexuality, even though there is no monolithic theological endorsement for heterosexuality. Instead, religious scholars from various faith traditions and denominations within those traditions interpret religious textual

passages related to same-sex sexuality, same-sex relationships, and transgressive expressions of gender very differently (see section website for further resources on this issue).

Though many religious denominations throughout the years have worked vigorously to end oppression toward a number of groups, including those who transgress heterosexual norms, religious textual passages have been referenced throughout the ages to justify and rationalize the practices that marginalize, harass, deny rights, persecute, and oppress entire groups of people based on their non-conforming sexual or other identities. During various historical periods, people within different faith traditions have applied specific religious texts to establish and maintain hierarchical positions of power, domination, and privilege over individuals and groups targeted by these texts. For example, individuals, organizations, and entire nations have quoted specific textual passages to justify the construction and maintenance of the institution of slavery, the persecution and murder of Jews, male domination over and denial of rights of women, adult domination and persecution of young people, and demonization, marginalization, denial of rights, and extreme forms of oppression against LGB people, considering them anywhere from being creations of the Devil, to sinners and immoral, to being the embodiment of evil in the world, which, left unchecked, would result in the destruction of peoples and nations.

History has shown a symbiotic relationship between religious teachings concerning homosexuality and bisexuality, and the secular, legal, and political policies against homosexuality and bisexuality, whereby the religious justifies the secular, legal, and political. Religious, philosophical, social, and political attitudes set the groundwork for restrictive laws enacted toward the latter stages of imperial Roman civilization, and on, throughout the Middle Ages (enforced by Catholic Church practices and policies in medieval Europe), to the punitive civil laws of the nineteenth and twentieth century and into the present day. Laws doling out punishments, such as denial of marriage and child custody benefits, restrictions on engaging in military service, constraints in gaining employment, housing, insurance, health benefits, and public accommodations, flogging, banishment, bodily mutilation, incarceration, and death of the accused, have existed at various times in most countries. When we come to the contemporary United States, we must ask whether a society, founded on the guiding principle of the separation of religion from government, has the right to formulate and pass legislation based on religious tenets, which are not accepted by all—a question of great significance, given the continuing religious sanctions supporting heterosexuality.

“MEDICAL MODEL” SUPPORTS FOR HETEROSEXUALITY

One important rationale for heterosexuality is based upon the biological and psychological pathologizing of sexually transgressive people. From the so-called “Eugenics Movement” of the mid-nineteenth century through the twentieth century and beyond, medical and psychological professions have often proposed and addressed, in starkly medical language, the alleged “deficiencies” of, for example, gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people, as well as people who are differently-abled, youth, people of color, and elders (see sections 8 and 9).

Some members of the scientific community view LGB people as constituting a distinct biological type, characterized medically as a pathology. Rather than considering homosexuality and bisexuality merely as a manifestation of emotional and physical attractions along a broad spectrum of emotional and sexual possibilities, some sectors of the medical and psychological communities continue to pathologize homosexuality in medical and psychological terms. This has resulted in LGB people (often against their will) being hospitalized, committed to mental institutions, jailed, lobotomized, electroshocked, castrated, sterilized, and subjected to “aversion therapy,” “reparative therapy,” “Christian counseling,” and genetic counseling.

By deploying the “medical model” to investigate and pathologize the “other,” heteronormativity is perceived as unremarkable, an unquestioned, hegemonic norm against which all others are judged. Heterosexual norms justify and explain away the otherwise unacceptable persecution and oppression of non-conforming sexual identity groups, while avoiding issues of domination, privilege, subordination, and marginalization. This “medicalization” of homosexuality and bisexuality only serves to strengthen oppression and heterosexual privilege through its relative invisibility. Given this invisibility, issues of oppression and privilege are neither analyzed nor scrutinized, neither interrogated nor confronted.

We take the position that any problems with homosexuality and bisexuality are not with the sexual identity *per se*, not with who we are, but rather with the ways we are socially constructed and treated. Rather than projecting ourselves through the “medical model” as deficient, defective, diseased, disabled, criminal, inadequate, immature, functionally limited, troubled, many of us choose to project homosexuality and bisexuality through a “wellness model.” This approach fosters a positive social identity with a strong sense of culture and community, and envisions the LGB experience as one of difference in the spectrum of human intimacy, relationships, emotions, and sexuality, and a difference to be cherished, nurtured, and supported.

SOCIAL JUSTICE MODEL OF LIBERATION

Since the early to mid-nineteenth century, a linear history of homosexuality and bisexuality, predominately in the West, begins with the formation of a homosexual “identity” and a sense of community brought about by the growth of industrialization, competitive capitalism and wage labor, and the rise of modern science, which provided people with more social and personal options outside the home (D’Emilio 1983). It is only within the last 150 or so years that there has been an organized and sustained political effort to protect the rights of people with same-sex and both-sex attractions, and those who cross traditional constructions of gender expression. During this time, many individuals and organizations have rejected the medical and religious rationales for homosexuality and bisexuality, while embracing a social justice model, which investigates and attempts to address the ways in which social structures promote and maintain issues of domination and subordination.

A brief chronology of the movements toward societal liberation in this arena follows. The “Homosexual Emancipation Movement” began in Germany in the 1860s when Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, a lawyer from Hanover, wrote on the topic of same-sex love. Karoly Maria Benkert (also known as Karl Maria Kertbeny) coined the terms “homosexual” and “heterosexual” in 1869 to convince the religious, legal, and scientific communities that same-sex attractions, though not the norm, were widespread and therefore should not be legally penalized. Literary tradition in England in the nineteenth century c.e. celebrated same-sex relationships. The first homosexual rights group in the United States formed in 1924 in Chicago—called the Society for Human Rights, it was founded by Henry Gerber, a German U.S.–American who had been influenced by the emancipation movement in Germany. The “Homophile Movement” in the United States began with such groups as the Mattachine Society and Daughters of Bilitis (see section website for resources describing this history). Many historians and activists place the beginning of the modern movement for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender equality at the Stonewall Inn, a small bar frequented by young people including drag queens, lesbians, bisexuals, gay males, street people, students, and others located in New York City’s Greenwich Village. In the early morning of June 28, 1969, when New York City police officers conducted a routine raid on the bar, the occupants fought back with bottles, rocks, bricks, trash cans, and parking meters used as battering rams in a pitched battle lasting five days.

Out of the ashes of the Stonewall Inn, a number of groups formed, for example the Gay Liberation Front, Gay Activists Alliance, Radical Lesbians, and others. The Christopher Street Liberation Day Umbrella Committee formed in New York City to plan activities and a march on Sunday June 28, 1970, up Sixth Avenue. From that first march grew others throughout the world. June each year is now reserved for local “Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Pride” activities.

Bisexuals, who had (since the beginning) been alongside gay and lesbian activists, began to organize for the rights of bisexuals in the mid- to late 1970s. For a number of reasons neither the gay and lesbian rights movement nor mainstream political movements initially responded to the needs of bisexuals. At first, bisexual women organized themselves in same-sex groups for support and consciousness-raising; bisexual men later followed this example.

By 1972, parents and friends were organizing support groups for themselves and their loved ones. Today, a national network of local chapters of the organization Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (or PFLAG) offers support and is on the front lines in helping to defeat heterosexism.

Founded to fight governmental and societal inaction, in 1986, the intergenerational direct-action group ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) formed in New York City. A network of local chapters quickly grew in over 120 cities throughout the world under the theme “Silence = Death” beneath an inverted pink triangle. In addition, the youth-oriented group Queer Nation formed in 1990 with independent chapters soon appearing in local communities around the country. Chanting, “We’re here. We’re queer. We’re fabulous. Get used to it,” Queer Nation members stressed “queer visibility” and an end to heterosexual privilege and heterosexism.

And on the cutting edge of the movement for equality and pride are transgender people who are coming out of another closet in large numbers and making the links in our understanding of transgender oppression, heterosexism, and sexism (see section 7). Young people are “coming out of the closet” with pride earlier than ever before and organizing school and community-based groups (such as Gay/Straight Alliances) in middle schools and high schools, colleges, and communities throughout the country and around the world. A growing number of LGB people are raising children, proving that love is what it takes to make a family. Some activists are pushing for the right for same-sex couples to marry, others are working to lift the ban against LGB from openly serving in the military, while the opposition is trying to prevent these from happening. Others are working tirelessly to eliminate the harassment, bullying, and violence directed against anyone who appears “different” that continues to plague our schools and society, which harms and literally kills so many each year.

Originally meaning “different” or “outside the norm,” the term *queer* has often been used as a derogatory term. Some lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people, however, have turned the term around by using it in an inclusive way and as a term of empowerment. First, young people adopted the term as a non-label to deconstruct sexual and gender categories as a form of resistance. It is used now at times to denote a person who is not heterosexual or not gender-normative. Following the lead of young people, what has come to be referred to as “Queer Theory” and “Queer Studies,” with such notable writers as Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick, among many others, is now having enormous impact on college and university campuses as a bona fide academic discipline (see website for further resources).

READING SELECTIONS IN THIS SECTION

This section begins with a number of essays conveying key historical and social contexts of heterosexism. “How Homophobia Hurts Everyone” (selection 78) provides a conceptual framework

by discussing what homophobia is and how it affects everyone regardless of their actual or perceived sexual identity. Marcia Deihl and Robyn Ochs (selection 79) define biphobia and investigate myths about bisexual people. "The InterSEXion: A Vision for a Queer Progressive Agenda" (selection 80) by Deepali Gokhale cuts to the core of heterosexism by looking at the economic systems that support oppression. Devon W. Carbado (selection 81) provides an expanded and nuanced investigation of the concept of dominant group privilege. Pat Griffin (selection 82) addresses issues of heterosexism and, specifically, anti-female oppression in organized sports.

We begin the Voices section with "The Loving Decision" (selection 83), which connects the cause for the legalization of same-sex marriage with past battles for interracial marriage. Ellen Goodman (selection 84) forcefully argues for the right of adoption of children by same-sex couples. Daniel E. Solís y Martínez (selection 85) crosses cultural, gender, and sexuality borders to negotiate a personal vision of identity.

In the concluding Next Steps section, Nancy J. Evans and Jamie Washington (selection 86) provide both a theoretical and a practical foundation on the ways in which heterosexually identified people can become allies to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people.

This section represents heterosexism from multiple perspectives, and emphasizes the more overt forms of this type of oppression. Other selections that convey the joyful and day-to-day lived experiences and illustrate the diverse and multifaceted historical and cultural aspects of LGB people in Western and non-Western perspectives appear among the Further Resources/Reading Selections on the heterosexism section website.

Note

- 1 A percentage of the population (approximately 1 in 2000) is born with male and female sexual organs to various degrees, or indeterminate genitalia. They are neither male nor female but, rather, comprise another birth sex. So, in actuality, there are more than two sexes.

References

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How Homophobia Hurts Everyone

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It is often said that, in the midst of misfortune, something unexpectedly valuable arises, and this has indeed been my experience. While traveling alone through Scandinavia one summer, I began to lose the vision in both my eyes. When I reached Denmark. I went to a hospital for an evaluation, and, after a number of tests, a physician notified me that my retinas had detached, probably because of a congenital defect. She advised immediate

surgery to prevent further deterioration, and I was admitted to the Community Hospital in Copenhagen.

The next day, my sister, Susan, flew to Copenhagen to be with me for what turned out to be nearly two months.

That summer in this distant northern land, fearing the permanent loss of my vision, I lay in a narrow hospital bed longing for friends and relatives back home. But as Susan sat with me day after day, giving her love, her courage, her humor (and spectacular Danish pastries), something remarkable happened. Amid the bells of a distant church tolling away the passing hours, Susan and I genuinely got to know one another for the first time.

Although we inhabited the same house for over seventeen years, there was always some unspoken tension between us, some wall keeping us apart. Having only eighteen months separating us in age, we attended the same schools and had similar peer groups. For the first few years of our lives, we seemed to get along fine. We had a few friends in common, and we usually found time to play together most days. Our closeness, however, was soon to come to an end.

By the time I reached the age of seven or eight, I was increasingly becoming the target of harassment and attack by my peers, who perceived me as someone who was different. Names like *queer*, *sissy*, *little girl*, and *fag* were thrown at me like the large red ball the children hurled on the school yard in dodge ball games. During subsequent years, the situation only got worse. I tried to avoid other children and increasingly kept to myself. Susan and I grew apart. Only when we were both in our early twenties, about the time I went to Denmark, were we beginning to rediscover one another and to share the details of our lives.

While in college, I began to sort out how I had suffered as a gay male under the force of homophobia, but until my hospitalization I had very little idea how it had also affected Susan growing up as my heterosexually oriented younger sister. Smart, attractive, outgoing, she appeared to have, at least from my vantage point, plenty of friends and seemed to fit in. In Denmark, however, she confided to me that, throughout our school years, she was continually teased for having a “faggot” brother. On one occasion, she recalled some of the older boys laughing at her, asking if she were “like her brother.” When she witnessed other students harassing me, peer pressure, coupled with her own fear of becoming a target, compelled her to distance herself from me by adding her voice to the chorus of insults. I felt betrayed, and at the time despised her for it.

Our time together in my hospital room permitted us the needed chance to define the basis of our past estrangement. Through the tears, the apologies, the rage at having been raised in an oppressive environment, and the regrets over losing so much precious time, we began the process of healing our relationship. As it turned out, my vision was not the only thing restored to me that summer.

This essay represents the growth of a seed planted in my mind back in Denmark. It centers around one primary premise: within each of the numerous forms of oppression, members of the target group (sometimes called “minority”) are oppressed while on some level members of the dominant or agent group are hurt. Although the effects of oppression differ qualitatively for specific target and agent groups, in the end everyone loses.

Most of us hold simultaneous membership in a number of groups based, for example, on our personal and physical characteristics, on our abilities and class backgrounds, and on our cultural, racial, or religious identifications. We may find ourselves both in groups targeted for oppression and in those dominant groups granted relatively higher degrees of power and prestige. By examining how we are disadvantaged as well as looking at the privileges we have, we can develop empathy for individuals different from ourselves and create a basis for alliances.

This essay, therefore, is really about alliances: support for the maintenance and strengthening of alliances where they currently exist and assistance in forging new ones where

none has existed before—specifically, alliances between and among lesbians, gay males, bisexuals, transgender people, and heterosexuals.

HOW ARE LGBT PEOPLE OPPRESSED BY HOMOPHOBIA?

Lesbians, gay males, bisexuals, and transgender (LGBT) people are among the most despised groups in the United States today. Perhaps paradoxically, for many in our society, love of sameness (i.e., *homo*-sexuality) makes people different, whereas love of difference (i.e., *hetero*-sexuality) makes people the same.

Much has been written about the ways homophobia in many Western cultures targets LGBT people, ranging from negative beliefs about these groups (which may or may not be expressed), to exclusion, denial of civil and legal protections, and, in some cases, overt acts of violence. Negative attitudes internalized by members of these groups often damage the spirit and stifle emotional growth.

Homophobia operates on four distinct but interrelated levels: the *personal*, the *interpersonal*, the *institutional*, and the *cultural* (also called the collective or societal).

Personal homophobia refers to a personal belief system (a prejudice) that LGBT people either deserve to be pitied as unfortunate beings who are powerless to control their desires or should be hated, that they are psychologically disturbed, genetically defective, unfortunate misfits, that their existence contradicts the “laws” of nature, that they are spiritually immoral, infected pariahs, disgusting—to put it quite simply, that they are generally inferior to heterosexuals.

Interpersonal homophobia is manifest when a personal bias or prejudice affects relations among individuals, transforming prejudice into its active component—discrimination. Examples of interpersonal homophobia are name calling or “joke” telling intended to insult or defame individuals or groups; verbal and physical harassment and intimidation as well as more extreme forms of violence; the withholding of support, rejection, or abandonment by friends and other peers, coworkers, and family members: refusal of landlords to rent apartments, shop owners to provide services, insurance companies to extend coverage, and employers to hire on the basis of actual or perceived sexual identity. And the list goes on.

A study by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) found that more than 90 percent of the respondents had experienced some form of victimization based on their sexual identity and that over 33 percent had been threatened directly with violence. Approximately one-third of the respondents were assaulted verbally, while more than one in fifteen were physically abused by members of their own families.

Reports of violence directed against lesbians, gay males, bisexuals, and transgender people have increased each year since the NGLTF has been keeping records, and such incidents are only the tip of the iceberg. By no means are they isolated to certain locales; rather, they are widespread, occurring throughout the country.

In 2009, the United States Congress passed the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act, which for the first time made it a federal crime to assault or attack a person based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

Institutional homophobia refers to the ways in which governments, businesses, and educational, religious, and professional organizations systematically discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation or identity. Sometimes laws, codes, or policies actually enforce such discrimination. Few institutions have policies supportive of LGBT people, and many actively work against not only those minorities but also heterosexuals who support them.

Consider, for example, the “Briggs” Initiative in the late 1970s: had it passed, it would have required the dismissal of California teachers who support gay, lesbian, and bisexual

rights regardless of those teachers' actual sexual identification. The U.S. military has a long-standing policy excluding lesbians, gays, and bisexuals from service. In most instances, rights gained through marriage, including spousal benefits and child custody considerations, do not extend to LGBT people. Homosexual acts were outlawed in a number of states until 2003. And although a number of municipalities and some states have extended equal protection in the areas of employment, housing, insurance, credit, and public accommodations, no such statute exists on the national level.

Although agreement concerning same-sex relationships and sexuality does not exist across the various religious communities, and while some denominations are rethinking their negative stands on homosexuality and bisexuality, others preach against such behaviors, and as a matter of policy exclude people from many aspects of religious life simply on the basis of sexual identity.

Until 1973, established psychiatric associations considered homosexuality a disordered condition. People were often institutionalized against their will, made to undergo dangerous and humiliating "aversion therapy," and even, at times, lobotomized to alter their sexual desires. Same-sex lovers and friends are often still denied access to loved ones in hospital intensive-care units because of hospital policy allowing only blood relatives or a legal spouse visitation rights.

Today, although a number of practitioners within both the psychiatric and the medical professions hold genuinely enlightened attitudes regarding the realities of homosexuality, bisexuality, and transgenderism, some, unfortunately, remain entrenched in their negative perceptions of same-sex attractions and gender expression, and these perceptions often affect the manner in which they respond to their clients.

Cultural homophobia (sometimes called *collective* or *societal* homophobia) refers to the social norms or codes of behavior that, although not expressly written into law or policy, nonetheless work within a society to legitimize oppression. It results in attempts either to exclude images of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender people from the media or from history or to represent these groups in negative stereotypical terms. The theologian James S. Tinney suggests seven overlapping categories by which cultural homophobia is manifested.

- 1, 2 *Conspiracy to silence and denial of culture.* These first two categories are closely aligned. Although not expressly written into law, societies informally attempt to prevent large numbers of individuals of a particular minority (or target) group from congregating in any one place (e.g., in bars and other social centers), deny them space to hold social or political functions, deny them access to materials, attempt to restrict representation in any given educational institution or employment in any business, and inhibit frank, open, and honest discussion of topics of interest to or concerning these groups.
- 3 *Denial of popular strength.* Many studies have found that a significant percentage of the population experiences same-sex desires, and that these individuals often define their identity in terms of these desires. The cultural assumption exists, however, that one is heterosexual until "proven guilty." According to Tinney, "Society refuses to believe how many blacks there are in this country 'passing' for white and how many lesbians and gays [and bisexuals] there are out there passing as heterosexuals" (Tinney, 1985, 5).
- 4 *Fear of overvisibility.* A form of homophobia is manifested each time LGBT people are told that they should not define themselves in terms of their sexuality or gender identity or when they are accused of being "blatant" by expressing signs of affection in public, behaviors that heterosexual couples routinely take for granted. They are given the message that there is something inherently wrong with same-sex desire and that individuals so inclined should keep such desire well hidden and to themselves.

- 5 *Creation of defined public spaces.* Society tends to force disenfranchised individuals and groups into ghettos, where there is little possibility of integration into the general life of the community. Neighborhoods, business establishments, and even professions are thus set aside for LGBT people as they are for other target groups. Individuals enter these areas hoping to find temporary respite from the outside world's homophobia.
- 6 *Denial of self-labeling.* Epithets and other derogatory labels are directed at every target group. LGBT people have chosen terms of self-definition (e.g., gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, for example) to portray the positive aspects of their lives and loves more adequately. Recently, increasing numbers of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender people have reappropriated such terms as *queer*, *faggot*, and *dyke* in order to transform these venomous symbols of hurt and bigotry into tools of empowerment.
- 7 *Negative symbolism (stereotyping).* Stereotyping groups of people is used as a means of control and a further hindrance to understanding and to meaningful social change. Stereotypes about LGBT people abound, ranging from their alleged predatory appetites, to their physical appearance, to the possible "causes" of their desires.

In addition to Tinney's categories of cultural homophobia, psychologist Dorothy Riddle suggests that the concepts of *tolerance* and *acceptance* should also be included: tolerance because it can, in actuality, be a mask for an underlying fear or even hatred (one is tolerant, e.g., of a baby crying on an airplane while simultaneously wishing it would stop or go away), and acceptance because it assumes that there is indeed something to accept.

HOW HOMOPHOBIA HURTS EVERYONE

It cannot be denied that homophobia, like other forms of oppression, serves the dominant group by establishing and maintaining power and mastery over those who are marginalized or disenfranchised. Individuals maintain oppressive behaviors to gain certain rewards or to avoid punishment, to protect their self-esteem against psychological doubts or conflicts, to enhance their value systems, or to categorize others in an attempt to comprehend a complex world. By excluding entire groups of people, those in positions of power obtain economic, political, ideological, and other privileges. In many ways, though, oppression, in this instance homophobia, ultimately limits heterosexuals.

Homophobia inhibits the ability of heterosexuals to form close, intimate relationships with members of their own sex.

Young people often form close same-sex attachments during their childhood years. But once they reach a certain age (usually around the time of puberty), their elders encourage them to distance themselves from these friends, with the implication that if they do not, their sexuality will be called into question. This means—especially for males—no more sleeping over at each other's houses, no more sharing intimate secrets, no more spending as much time together. Ultimately, this situation tends to hinder the ability of heterosexual adults to get as close to a same-sex friend as they once did when they were very young.

Homophobia locks all people into rigid gender-based roles that inhibit creativity and self-expression.

Much has been written about gender roles and how they constrain both females and males. In Western culture, concepts of masculinity and femininity promote the domination of males over females and reinforce the identification of maleness with power. Males are encouraged to be independent, competitive, goal oriented, and unemotional, to value

physical courage and toughness. Females, on the other hand, are taught to be nurturing, emotional, sensitive, expressive, to be caretakers of others while disregarding their own needs.

Gender roles maintain the sexist structure of society, and homophobia reinforces those roles—for example, by casting such epithets as *faggot*, *dyke*, and *homo* at people who step outside designated gender roles. This pervasive social conditioning based on anatomical sex effectively generates great disparities between males and females. For evidence of this inequality one need only look at the preponderance of men over women in upper management positions and other positions of prestige, or at the fact that women still do not earn equal pay for equal work. There is also evidence, in a classic 1935 anthropological study of three cultures by Margaret Mead, that there is an increased incidence of violence against women in male-dominated societies.

Homophobic conditioning (and indeed all forms of oppression) compromises the integrity of heterosexual people by pressuring them into treating others badly, actions contrary to their basic humanity.

By way of analogy. Frederick Douglass, the famous nineteenth-century abolitionist who escaped slavery, described what he called “the dehumanizing effects” of slavery not on slaves alone, but also on white slave owners, whose position to slavery corrupted their humanity. Describing his experiences with Mrs. Sophia Auld, mistress of the Baltimore household in which Douglass lived and worked during the 1820s, Douglass wrote,

My new mistress proved to be a woman of the kindest heart and finest feelings. But, alas, this kind heart had but a short time to remain such. The fatal poison of irresponsible power was already in her hands, and soon commenced its infernal work. Slavery soon proved its ability to divest her of (her) heavenly qualities. Under its influence, the tender heart became stone, and the lamblike disposition gave way to one of tigerlike fierceness.

(Douglass 1845, 77–78)

Homophobia can be used to stigmatize, silence, and, on occasion, target people who are perceived or defined by others as gay, lesbian, or bisexual but who are in actuality heterosexual.

For more than two millennia in the West, antihomosexual laws and decrees have been enacted by religious denominations and governments carrying punishments ranging from ridicule to death of the “accused.” These decrees have been used to justify harsh treatment of those discovered or believed to have engaged in same-sex activity. But what is often forgotten or overlooked is the fact that these same laws have, on occasion, been used by individuals and governments to silence opponents, regardless of whether they have engaged in same-sex activity.

In 1871, Paragraph 175 of the German Penal Code banned homosexuality. It was later used by the Nazi regime to incarcerate and ultimately to send great numbers of men suspected of being homosexual to their death, and was also at time employed to incarcerate Catholic clergy, many of whom were heterosexual, as well as non-Catholic heterosexuals who opposed state authority. In addition, “sodomy” laws remained on the books until 2003 in many states in the U.S. Although designed chiefly to harass persons engaging in same-sex activity, they have also been used to prosecute heterosexuals.

The Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund—a New York-based gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender-oriented legal organization—defended a twenty-six-year-old heterosexual man who was denied health insurance because he was unmarried, living in New York City with a male roommate, and therefore presumed to be gay and stereotypically

assumed to be at increased risk for HIV/AIDS. Heterosexual male hairdressers and female gym teachers and other heterosexuals working in professions widely perceived to be “gay,” along with single people living in red-lined “gay” zip codes, are also vulnerable to victimization by similar homophobia-based discrimination.

Violent “queer-bashing” is not infrequently directed against heterosexuals who are also perceived to be gay or lesbian. The clear implication here is that all people are at risk for attack, irrespective of their actual sexual identity, so long as any group remains the target of violent hate-motivated assaults.

Homophobia generally restricts communication with a significant portion of the population and, more specifically, limits family relationships.

No matter how they are constituted, families will continue to produce lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender offspring. The political and theocratic Right argues loudly that homosexuality poses a direct threat to “traditional family values.” In actuality, however, it is homophobia that strains family relationships by restricting communication among family members, loosening the very ties that bind. Children, fearing negative reactions from parents, hold back important information about their lives. Parents, often not wanting to hear about their child’s sexual or gender identity, never truly get to know their children. Even when parents and children reside in the same house, secret upon secret adds up to polite estrangement and sometimes to a total break.

When LGBT people finally do “come out” to their relatives and friends, the heterosexual relatives and friends sometime go into a “closet” as their homophobia and/or that of those around them leads them to withhold the truth from friends and neighbors. Indeed, family members sometime become targets of stigmatization when the truth about an LGBT relative becomes known. In any case, the emotional toll can be great.

Homophobia ultimately undermines the process of parenting in all families. It harms not only those in the more obvious cases where there are LGBT children, or LGBT parents, but it also imposes great impediments to “mainstream” heterosexual families with heterosexual children.

Societal homophobia prevents some lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people from developing an authentic self-identity, and adds to the pressure to marry, which in turn places undue stress and oftentimes trauma on themselves as well as their heterosexual spouses and their children.

The suppression of information about the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender experience reinforces the heterosexist assumption that everyone is or should be heterosexual and should conform to standard conceptualizations of gender expression. This assumption, coupled with the frequently very real penalties for not conforming to heterosexual norms, has pressured many people either to hide their true sexual and/or gender identity or has restricted their self-realization. Some have married in an attempt to “fit in” or “pass,” or in hopes of “being cured” of their same-sex attractions and/or their gender expressions.

Homophobia is one cause of premature sexual involvement that increases the chances of teen pregnancy and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

Young people, of all sexual identities, are often pressured to become *heterosexually* active to prove to themselves and others that they are “normal.” If homophobia were reduced in the schools and society at large, in all likelihood, fewer young people would act out *heterosexually* during adolescence.

Homophobia combined with sexphobia (fear and revulsion of sex) results in the elimination of any discussion of the lives and sexuality of sexual minorities as part of school-based sex education, keeping vital information from all students. Such a lack of information can kill people in the age of AIDS.

Some religious and community leaders, educators, and parents actively work to prevent honest and nonjudgmental information concerning homosexuality, bisexuality, and transgenderism—indeed, sexuality and gender in general—from reaching young people. Students of all sexual and gender identities need this information to make informed decisions about their sexual activity. Without it, they are placed at greater risk for unwanted pregnancy, STDs, and HIV infection.

Homophobia (along with racism, sexism, classism, sexphobia, and others) inhibits a unified and effective governmental and societal response to AIDS.

It can be reasonably argued that if the majority of people with AIDS had initially been middle-class, white, suburban heterosexual males, rather than gay and bisexual men, people of color, working-class people, sex workers (prostitutes), and drug users, then governmental and societal institutions would have mobilized immediately to defeat the epidemic.

Because of the lack of wide-scale early attention, AIDS has spread to pandemic proportions. The government and society, at least initially, did not make a true commitment to education, research, and treatment. Funding remained insufficient for as many years as AIDS retained its erroneous reputation of a disease of outcast sexual and social minorities. The result was, and in some sectors continues to be, that many heterosexuals have a false sense that they will not be affected, and take no precautions.

Homophobia prevents heterosexuals from accepting the benefits and gifts offered by the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered communities: theoretical insights, spiritual visions and options, contributions in the arts and culture, to religion, to family life, indeed to all facets of society.

In cultures where homophobia is present, there have been active attempts to falsify historical accounts of same-sex love—through censorship, deletion, half-truths, and altering pronouns signifying gender—making accurate reconstruction extremely difficult. This effectively distorts society's collective memory (i.e., history), clouding our sense of identity as individuals and as social beings. Everyone loses from this suppression of the truth.

John Boswell cites an example of this censorship in a manuscript of *The Art of Love* by the Roman author Ovid. A phrase that originally read, "A boy's love appealed to me less" (*Hoc est quod pueri tanger amore minus*) was altered by a Medieval moralist to read, "A boy's love appealed to me not at all" (*Hoc est quod pueri tanger amore nihil*), and an editor's note that appeared in the margin informed the reader. "Thus you may be sure that Ovid was not a sodomite" (*Ex hoc nota quod Ovidius nonfreit Sodomita*).

Boswell also cites a Renaissance example of homophobic censorship in which Michelangelo's grand-nephew changed the sex of the subject of his uncle's sonnets to make them more acceptable to the public.

Closer to our time, government-sponsored censorship of art deemed "homeroetic" by the National Endowment for the Arts ultimately restricted creativity and freedom of expression of the entire artistic community.

In addition, traditional religious teachings on homosexuality keep lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender people from entering religious life or from being true to themselves. These teachings also inhibit the ability of many congregations to value and celebrate human diversity and, most importantly, impedes spiritual growth.

Homophobia saps energy from more constructive endeavors.

Like all forms of oppression, homophobia inhibits our ability to understand the nature and scope of truly serious and far-reaching social problems (e.g., poverty, illiteracy, war, disease, environmental decay, crime, and drug addiction). Oppression results in the scapegoating and distancing of people from one another, diminishing our capacity to address these problems and thereby degrading the quality of life for all of us. By reducing the various forms of oppression, we quite literally make our society more socially efficient, increasing our ability to find solutions to the social and ecological challenges that threaten our collective future.

Homophobia inhibits appreciation of other types of diversity, making it unsafe for everyone because each person has unique traits not considered mainstream or dominant. Therefore, we are all diminished when any one of us is demeaned.

As Reverend Martin Niemoeller wrote during World War II,

In Germany they came first for the Communists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Communist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a trade unionist. Then they came for the Catholics, and I didn't speak up because I was a Protestant. Then they came for me, and by that time no one was left to speak up.

(in Bartlett, 1980, 824)

The meaning is quite clear. When any particular group of people is scapegoated, it is ultimately everyone's concern. For today, gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people are targeted. Tomorrow, they may come for you. Therefore, it is in everyone's self-interest to work actively to dismantle all the many forms of oppression, including homophobia.

CONCLUSION

In truth, homophobia is pervasive throughout the society and each of us, irrespective of sexual or gender identity, is at risk of its harmful effects. Within the schools, homophobia compromises the entire educational environment. Though homophobia did not originate with us and we are not to blame, we are all responsible for its elimination and, therefore, all can gain by a closer examination of the issues.

Lesbians, bisexuals, gay males, and transgender people have been, and continue to be, on the front lines in fighting against homophobia, and standing by our sides are supportive heterosexual allies—people who have worked and continue to work through their own homophobic conditioning, who are secure with their own sexual identities, who have joined us and have not cared when others called their sexuality into question.

We are *all* born into a great pollution called homophobia (one among many forms of oppression) that falls upon us like acid rain. For some people, spirits are tarnished to the core; others are marred on the surface, but no one is completely protected. Yet neither are we to blame. We had no control over the formulation of this pollution, nor did we direct it to pour down upon us. On the other hand, we all have a responsibility, indeed an opportunity, to join together to construct protective shelters from the corrosive effect of oppression while working to clean up the homophobic environment in which we live. Once sufficient steps are taken to reduce this pollution, we will all breathe a lot easier.

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Biphobia

Marcia Deihl and Robyn Ochs

I was in a feminist bookstore. As the woman rang up my purchase, she asked me if a "lesbian discount" was appropriate. I was somewhat taken aback, but I said (half in jest), "Well, I'm bisexual, so how about half?" She didn't smile and I didn't get a discount.

My friend had been active in her lesbian community for several years. Then she fell in love with a man. When her lesbian "friends" found out, they ostracized her and held a "funeral" for her.

I came out to my brother several years ago and he seems on many levels to accept my bisexual identity. However, about a year ago I was visiting him and he took special care to request that I not discuss my bisexuality in the presence of his friends.

I told a heterosexual male friend that I was bisexual. His response was to make repeated attempts to sexualize our relationship. He made the false assumption that since I was bi-SEX-ual, I was attracted to everybody.

STORIES AND STEREOTYPES

These are all stories that have happened to bisexuals. Some of these mirror homophobia, others heterophobia, and still others are specifically "biphobic." All of them oppress bisexuals.

Biphobia: What is it? It is fear of the other and fear of the space between categories. Our identity categories are founded on the illusion that there are two separate and mutually exclusive sexual identities—female and male—and that there are two separate and mutually exclusive sexual orientations—homosexual and heterosexual. You are either one or the other and are attracted to one or the other. Those who are not like you are very different—opposite, in fact—and you needn't worry about becoming like them. There is no space for fluidity. Biphobia, like homophobia, is prejudice based on negative stereotypes. It is often born of ignorance.

Everybody knows about bisexuals. They're going through a stage before settling into their "mature" gay or straight identity ("She's really a lesbian, but she can't admit it yet." "He's just experimenting. He'll go back to his wife in the end." "She's a BUG: Bisexual Until Graduation."). Or, they're afraid of the other sex and find the same sex less threatening. Or, they're sex maniacs and swingers who can't commit.

In April of 1983, an “April Fools” cartoon appeared in Boston’s *Gay Community News*. It showed a jilted lesbian who had been left by her bisexual lover for a man. After that, she was prepared with “bisexuality insurance.” The BiVocals, a newly formed bisexual support group, angrily responded, “Sometimes we do leave women for men. We also leave men for women, women for women, and men for men. But we don’t leave our lovers any more cruelly or frequently than any other group . . . And sometimes we are assholes, just like some lesbians” (BiVocals 1983, 4).

FEAR FROM HETEROSEXUAL PEOPLE

Homophobic heterosexual men and women alike react to bisexuality as they react to homosexuality. But with bisexuality, there is the added dimension of identification with the perceived “straight half” of a bisexual person. They may be even more threatened, because they see that the “other” is not different enough, turning fantasy into a very real possibility.

Sigmund Freud and Alfred Kinsey agree that there is a spectrum of sexuality from exclusively heterosexual to exclusively homosexual. This view is shared by a number of current researchers. For example biologist Joan E. Roughgarden of Stanford University says, “We should be calling humans bisexual because this idea of exclusive homosexuality is not accurate of people. Homosexuality is mixed in with heterosexuality across cultures and history” (quoted in Driscoll 2008, para 26). Somerset Maugham once said, “I tried to persuade myself that I was three-quarters normal and that only a quarter of me was queer . . . whereas it was the other way round” (Rutledge 1988, 46).

Heterosexually-identified people resisting their own same-sex fantasies due to internalized homophobia will probably be threatened by bisexuality in others. (“I don’t deserve what I want.” “It’s sinful.”) Those who respond heterosexually for positive, clear, inner-directed reasons are less likely to be threatened.

We can’t “convert” anyone. We don’t have the right to come out for anyone else or to insist that someone is “really bisexual.” We don’t have the right to judge another’s reasons for pursuing or avoiding intimacy with a given sex. We simply want it to be known that there are more than two options, and a wide range of variations. Some of our best allies are secure heterosexual people.

Heterosexual men and women will react slightly differently to bisexual men and bisexual women than they might react to gay men and lesbians. A homophobic straight man may respond similarly to a bisexual man as he does to a gay man (e.g., “Sissy!”). This sentiment may mask the outrage that men feel about other men renouncing their patriarchal prerogative of superiority to women. We have seen documentaries in which the Marines refer to recruits in basic training as “ladies” and “girls” in a derogatory sense. These names are considered the worst possible put-down for men who aren’t being “masculine” enough. Another typical homophobic reaction is “I just know he’s going to make a pass at me.” In this imagined situation, a heterosexual man sees himself in the position of potential “prey.” Terrified and outraged, he fears being overpowered, a situation familiar to most women.

Heterosexual women cannot write off bisexual men as “just friends” with no potential sexual undercurrents, as they might do with gay men. But they cannot assume that these men are attracted to them either. Heterosexual women may see bisexual women as better “initiation” experiences than lesbians, or they may assume that bisexual women are after them.

Bisexuality defies old categories and evokes new responses. Many heterosexuals and homosexuals alike deny the existence of bisexuality. A great deal of this ignorance is rooted in our invisibility. We range from being dismissed as a politicized identity group (“Oh,

everyone's a little bit bisexual!") to being seen as a point of contention in a film or television plot. In this instance, bisexuality becomes visible when a character who was previously assumed to be heterosexual or homosexual leaves someone for someone else, engages in a triangulated relationship, or "cheats," and is then re-cast as bisexual.

Furthermore, some bisexuals are more invisible than others. Although there are notable exceptions, bisexuals who are not middle or upper class, conventionally "beautiful," able-bodied, or white are rarely represented. And bisexuals who lead unremarkable lives are usually seen by others—depending upon the sex of their partners—as gay or as straight. By and large, the only bisexual people who are recognized *as bisexuals* are those with multiple male and female partners, or those who leave one lover for another, lending fuel to the perception that these are common bisexual behaviors.

FEAR FROM LESBIAN AND GAY PEOPLE

The early homophile (1950s and 1960s), gay liberation (1970s), and later equality movements have fought for the right of gay men and lesbians to exist, to love, and to be treated with dignity. Therefore, any perceived "regression" by gay people "converting" back to heterosexuality is considered a threat. This feeling is understandable. The gay and lesbian communities are under siege, especially in the so-called "culture wars" being waged by the political and theocratic right, and people under constant siege usually respond by banding together to form a united front. Thus, formerly gay and lesbian people who "turn bi" are often met with feelings of betrayal and anger. But these reactions belie the truth of the situation.

Why are bisexuals perceived as such a threat to so many gay men and lesbians? We see a combination of society's homophobia and internalized biphobia at work here. A recurring theme in Robyn's previous same-sex relationships was her lovers' fear that Robyn would leave her for a man. After all, so much of our society is structured to encourage and support heterosexual relationships. Though this has finally begun to change, families, the media, and institutions such as marriage and health insurance "family plans" are largely based on the configuration of the married heterosexual couple. These lovers may have felt that they could not possibly compete with the odds so stacked against them.

There is no denying that the encouragement of heterosexuality and the discouragement of homosexuality are real. But Robyn also felt that there was a certain amount of internalized biphobia at work there, too: the feeling that whatever she had to offer, and whatever they had together couldn't possibly outweigh the external benefits of heterosexual privilege. This view contains an underlying assumption that anyone who has the choice would ultimately choose heterosexuality, and that lesbians and gay men choose homosexual relationships because they are unable to be heterosexual. The number of bisexuals in committed same-sex relationships shows that this isn't necessarily so.

Some say that bisexuals are only half oppressed. Yet we are not put on half-time when we are fired by a homophobic boss; we do not lose only half of our children when we lose a custody battle; we cannot say to a gay-basher, "But I'm bisexual. Please only beat me up on only one side of my body!"

After Marcia was asked if she warranted the "lesbian discount," she thought seriously about it. "I respected the woman's right to run her store the way she wanted. I loved the idea that there was such a thing as a lesbian discount—a rare opportunity for lesbians to be rewarded, not made invisible or degraded. But, then I thought of my many years of gay and lesbian pride marches and my six years of playing in a feminist band that performed 25 to 50 percent lesbian material. During that time, I identified first as straight, then as lesbian,

and finally as bisexual. I think I *did* deserve at least half of the discount! They based their decision on my label, not my *labor*.”

Bisexuals should not automatically be categorized along with heterosexuals and end up being excluded from gay and lesbian communities. Yet, it is generally only famous bisexual people—reclassified as “gay” or “lesbian” people—like Virginia Woolf, Sappho, Christopher Isherwood, James Baldwin, Vita Sackville-West, Kate Millet, and Bessie Smith, who are embraced by lesbians and gay men. Modern-day bisexuals working common jobs and bearing ordinary names are not.

We won’t accept it both ways. Lesbian and gay communities cannot have it both ways; either bisexuals are in or we’re out. The feminist bookstore offering a lesbian discount was a store for *all* women, but lesbians got a discount; heterosexual and bisexual women did not. It seemed in this instance we were *out* of the community. We want to be in, but we are called divisive when we then name ourselves as a distinct category. Such attitudes often keep us away and only reinforce the impression that we have “deserted the ranks.”

Like heterosexual people who may be ignoring their homosexual inner signals, some gay men and lesbians may be repressing their bisexuality. If they act on these desires, they may fear the loss of their gay identity, their community, their culture, and their closest friends, as we noted in the case of the “funeral” story above. Others, who have chosen positively to be gay or lesbian, tend to be supportive of bisexuality in others. Those who are threatened or unsure of themselves are less so.

A clear example of biphobia is the exclusion of some bisexuals from lesbian and gay communities. This is ironic when one considers that the lesbian and gay liberation movement in the United States is united around the right to love whomever we please, and to have our relationships validated and recognized, even when they do not conform to society’s norms. Bisexuals are often pushed into a closet *within* a closet.

THE BISEXUAL ARTIST/CITIZEN TODAY: OUTSTANDING IN OUR FIELD

Can you spot a bisexual when you meet one? Perhaps, but not necessarily. We come in every conceivable outer package—just like all other groups. What is important is what is inside. Our psyches are not split down the middle. We do not get up every day and think, “Should I be straight or gay today?” We are, every day, in all situations, bisexual.

In sum, we are not defined by our behavior, but by our essence. If we walk down the street holding hands with a woman, people will assume we are lesbians. If we walk down the street holding hands with a man, people will assume we are heterosexual. But we aren’t shifting; others’ perceptions are.

As public television’s Mr. Rogers told very young children, each of us is unique, with our own gifts and limitations. We are all artists, we are all queers; we are all “oddists.” And lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people have been forced to be creative. We experience a conflict between inner experience and outer demands that requires that we invent ourselves and think on our feet at every moment. Perhaps this is why we have contributed more than our share to the arts. As Fran Leibowitz quipped, “If you removed all of the homosexuals and homosexual influence from what is generally regarded as American culture, you would pretty much be left with *Let’s Make a Deal*” (Rutledge 1988, 93). We would do well to join some Native American Indian cultures in considering differences in sexuality and gender expression as special, honored gifts, not as threatening deviations.

Being bisexual and naming ourselves makes us special. But that’s just the first step. We have our cultural work cut out for us. We need to create what wasn’t there before—our

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own lives, music, theater, writing, and art—just as some of us did with women’s culture. We need art that reflects, analyzes, reinvents, and inspires our daily lives. We must not simply react to biphobia, we must come together with others like ourselves to create new realities in art and in life.

Though we are unique, we are also like everyone else: we are citizens of this planet. We need to work in coalitions because we want to help clear up the many problems that face us and our children and grandchildren today. Problems of poverty, global warming, unjust wars, and violence affect us all. In order to solve these problems, action must be taken against heterosexism, sexism, racism, and class privilege. And since we are all minorities, we must work together on common causes in order to be effective. As connecting links at the intersection between gay and straight, bisexuals can play a unique role in this work.

Bisexuals are not fence-sitters: there is no fence. Sexuality is a giant field in which lesbian and gay people are clustered mostly on one side and heterosexually-identified people are clustered mostly on the other. We are not locked in place. Sometimes we travel toward one end, sometimes toward the other, and we can do this in a day or in a lifetime. We hereby declare a field day.

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The interSEXion

A Vision for a Queer Progressive Agenda

Deepali Gokhale

This vision is based on the fact that the queer community is a microcosm of humanity, intersecting through the common experiences of the oppression of gender identity and sexual identity, the observation that oppression is rooted in greed and perpetuated by the fear of scarcity, the assertion that no oppression can end without removing the systems that perpetuate it, the recognition that oppression and exploitation are the bases on which current power structures and economies rely, and the observation that because queer liberation requires the end of all forms of oppression and exploitation, the liberation of queer people can be seen as the key to the liberation of humanity itself.

THE ROOT OF QUEER OPPRESSION

Heterosexism is the belief that there are only two genders, and that a sexual relationship between a man and a woman is compulsory for full acceptance into society. It would seem that the root of queer oppression is heterosexism, and so queer folks should work against heterosexism. In order to get into any sort of depth in this work, we would need to know why heterosexism exists in the first place, and we would find that the reason for heterosexism is because it enforces patriarchy, which could lead us to join forces with the women's movement and oppose patriarchy. That venture would expose the fact that the reason patriarchy needs enforcement is because it is essential to capitalism, and that capitalism at its essence relies on greed. Therefore, the root of queer oppression, and in fact, the root of all systemic oppression as it exists in the world today, is unbridled greed.

Capitalism is based in greed, and as it exists today, cannot exist without exploiting labor. One person cannot make a disproportionately large share of profits unless somewhere in the process, another person is making a disproportionately small one. The most basic example of this is in the patriarchal nuclear family, where the man makes profits at the expense of a woman's (and children's) free labor. The people who most benefit from this unbridled greed are the ones who came up with capitalism to begin with: wealthy white men. This is true worldwide; every oppression that is in place exists to ultimately support white male power, and the United States is the clear leader and greatest benefactor of this system.

The main tools used to make an oppressive system work are a defined norm, economic power, and violence. In her book entitled *Homophobia: A Weapon of Sexism*, Suzanne Pharr explains it this way:

To understand the connection among the oppressions, we must examine their common elements. The first is a defined norm, a standard of rightness and often righteousness wherein all others are judged in relation to it. This norm must be backed up with institutional power, economic power, and both institutional and individual violence In the United States, that norm is male, white, heterosexual, Christian, temporarily able-bodied, youthful, and has access to wealth and resources

In order for these institutions to be controlled by a single group of people, there must be economic power Once economic control is in the hands of the few, all others can be controlled through limiting access to resources, limiting mobility, limiting employment options. People are pitted against one another through the perpetuation of the myth of scarcity which suggests that our resources are limited and blames the poor for using up too much of what little there is to go around The maintenance of societal and individual power and control requires the use of violence and the threat of violence. Institutional violence is sanctioned through the criminal justice system and the threat of the military—for quelling individual or group uprisings.

(1988, 53–56)

The patriarchal nuclear family, living in a single-family house in the suburbs, serves as the building block for capitalism. As the arbitrarily defined norm, it provides the perfect conditions for the oppression of women. Since men earn wage labor, they can easily control women's access to resources, and can easily accuse women of "spending too much" of "their" hard-earned money. By isolating women from each other, the nuclear family provides a safe haven for men to be violent towards women and thus enforce their power.

In relation to institutional power, the isolated nuclear family unit makes it easy for mass media to be the only source of information citizens receive, since people are no longer

talking to their neighbors, and ideally, by isolating the male in the household as the only breadwinner, the nuclear family can easily be moved around for the convenience of those who need wage labor. Because each family needs a house, a car, and their own household items, the nuclear family also promotes the wasteful unending consumerism and environmental exploitation required for “economic progress.” Irrespective of whether the nuclear family is actually the “norm,” as long as this belief is widespread, other types of families can be judged by whether they conform to that structure.

Everyone strives to conform to the nuclear family model, and a false sense of pride and righteousness is evident in those who “make it.” That many poor people, people of color, and immigrants do not fit into that kind of family is considered “their fault,” and not the result of those in power limiting access to the resources it takes to sustain a nuclear family. When this shame and blame is internalized, those who don’t fit the norm fight amongst themselves about why another oppressed group is the “problem with society.”

It is not just gender oppression that keeps capitalism in place. It requires the exploitation of the labor of anyone outside the “norm”: the white, wealthy, young, temporarily-abled, English-speaking Christian American male citizen. Racism exists to exploit the work of people of color, sexism exists to exploit women’s work, xenophobia exists to exploit the “third world,” and ageism/ableism devalues those who are assumed “less productive.” Many of us experience more than one of these oppressions. In addition to the myth of the nuclear family, patriotism, the illusion of a meritocracy, and religious oppression are the tools used to brainwash one group to look down on another and trust that the system is working for the “believers.” The illusion of scarcity and fear of our neighbors keeps us isolated from and fighting with each other. Divide and conquer is the rule. Meanwhile, those in power continue to reap the rewards.

A VISION FOR LIBERATION: THE INTERSEXION

It is because the queer community categorically rejects this setup, simply by being who we are, that we are such a threat to those in power. When they call gay marriage a threat to human civilization as we know it, they are referring to the fact that gender oppression in the form of heterosexism is the weapon that keeps them in power, and if those gender “norms” weren’t considered essential, there would be no way to enforce that oppression. It is precisely because we live outside the basic unit of the very nuclear family structure that would otherwise permit capitalism to continue unchallenged, and because our community experiences not only queer oppression but all oppressions, that we are most capable of creating an alternative culture outside of the culture of exploitation, resolving it for ourselves so that it can be expanded for those outside of our community.

A defining characteristic of the queer community is that within it is reflected all of the oppressions and privileges in our surrounding geography, and that these oppressions and privileges play out in similar proportions and methods. It is the intersection of every oppression and privilege, and the wholeness of the queer community is its power. There is no better place to understand the intersection of oppressions and figure out how to achieve liberation for all forms of life. Because we are an intersection based on gender identity and sexual identity, we can call ourselves the “interSEXion.”

We can start by building a real sense of wholeness within the queer community. While our oppressors would like us to remain separate and at odds with each other, we can use our queer oppression to bind us into making connections and understanding the nature of oppression itself. We can begin by socializing with each other. We can each individually learn about our own oppressions so that we know what we need. We can also learn about

our privileges, and use them to end the oppression of others. We can end racism, classism, sexism, and any other oppression within our community. We can create a safety net for ourselves so that we are not reliant on the systems of oppression used against us for our basic needs. We can pass the values of liberation that we create from one generation to the next, without the sense of ownership that is inherited with blood relations, and instead allowing each generation to use its own experience and creativity in the struggle. In this way, we will keep intact within our community what is being used to divide and conquer us elsewhere.

Once we have this safer community, non-reliant on the systems of oppression that keep us divided, we can break the systems of oppression for everyone else. We can use our wholeness as an advantage outside the queer community. As whole people with multiple identities, we can use our non-queer identities as bridges to other oppressed communities. Although it may be true that any oppressed community can build bridges, the queer community is particularly fortunate to have representatives from the actual communities surrounding it. Because the queer identity can many times be made invisible, queer people can have access to those communities in ways that no other oppressed community can.

Currently, the progressive community seems to operate in isolated spaces, divided by our issues and oppressions, with no one group to bind it together. We could use our wholeness and reflection of our geography to ensure our policy would most likely be beneficial for all progressive communities around us, and we can be the glue that binds it together and moves it forward. In many cases, we are leading those “other” progressive movements anyway.

The queer community could have a central “policy group” that would be informed by and be informative to any number of affinity groups. The responsibility of the policy group would be to take in the information from the affinity groups, get resources and create infrastructure to support the groups, and to create an overall policy/strategy/direction for achieving our goal of ending exploitation and oppression. This policy group would be accountable not only to the affinity groups, but also to individuals in the community, and we can hold community forums to keep a dialogue going with those individuals who may not belong to any group.

Our affinity groups could organize by whatever affinity they chose (geography, race, ethnicity, religion, class, gender, sexuality, age, campaign, cause, . . .), they could be groups that already exist (like AIDS Survival Project, ZAMI, TriKone Atlanta), and they could dissolve if/when they were no longer necessary, like if they were organized around a campaign. The groups could provide safe spaces for people to talk about particular oppressions or issues. People could belong to as many affinity groups as they wanted. The goals for each group for now could be: figuring out the most important issues for a particular affinity group, building a coalition to support the group, and figuring out a proactive strategy to address the group’s issues in order to inform the policy group.

If the affinity groups and the queer community make up an “inner circle” around our interSEXion, our allies could form a second circle around the first. Issue or campaign-based affinity groups can access our allies to form coalitions when needed. Our allies would benefit because through the interSEXion, we could be the quickest connection between allies that would form a coalition. Our allies could create connections even further outside our intersection, and reach people who would never associate themselves with a queer agenda, but would work on a particular issue or campaign through our allies.

Positioning our queer community as the interSEXion would not only ensure that we remain at the center of our own liberation, but it would also require us to leave no one behind. Being the interSEXion implies our community’s wholeness, and it requires us to be no less than a full human rights movement. It requires us to honor and celebrate the wholeness of each individual in it, and restricts some of us from achieving our goal of

liberation unless everyone in our community is free from oppression. It requires us to identify which parts of our community are underrepresented and to nurture those who are most wounded. It means we cannot even start towards a path of liberation until we are on equal footing within our own community. It requires us to walk our talk and liberate ourselves in order to liberate the world around us, and it is the reason why our interSEXion may be the key to the end of exploitation.

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Privilege

Devon W. Carbado

... This essay is part of a larger intellectual project to encourage a shift in—or at least a broadening of—our conceptualization of discrimination. My aim is to expand our notion of what it means to be a perpetrator of discrimination. Typically, we define a perpetrator of discrimination as someone who acts intentionally to bring about some discriminatory result. This is a narrow and politically palatable conception; it applies to very few of us. In this essay I suggest that those of us who unquestionably accept the racial, gender, and heterosexual privileges we have—those of us who fail to acknowledge our victimless status with respect to racism, sexism, and homophobia—are also perpetrators of discrimination.

Informing this privileged-centered understanding of discrimination is the notion that taking identity privileges for granted helps to legitimize problematic assumptions about identity and entitlement, assumptions that make it difficult for us to challenge the starting points of many of our most controversial conversations about equality. We simply assume, for example, that men should be able to fight for their country (the question is whether women should be entitled to this privilege); that heterosexuals should be able to get married (the question is whether the privilege should be extended to gays and lesbians); that white men should be able to compete for all the slots in a university's entering class (the question is whether people of color should be entitled to the privilege of "preferential treatment").

While a privileged-centered conception of discrimination usefully reveals the bi-directional effects of discrimination—namely, that discrimination allocates both burdens and benefits—the conception may prove entirely too much. After all, all of us enjoy some degree of privilege. Are all of us perpetrators of discrimination? The answer may depend on what we do with, and to, the privileges we have. Each of us makes personal and private choices with our privileges that entrench a variety of social practices, institutional arrangements, and laws that disadvantage other(ed) people.

For example, many of us get married and/or attend weddings, while lesbian and gay marriages are, in most parts of the United States (and the world), not legally recognized. Others of us have racially monolithic social encounters, live in de facto white only (or

predominantly white) neighborhoods, or send our kids to white only (or predominantly white) schools. Still others of us have “straight only” associations—that is, our friends are all heterosexuals and our children’s friends all have mommies and daddies. These choices are not just personal; they are political. And their cumulative effect is to entrench the very social practices—racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia—we profess to abhor.

In other words, there is a link between identity privileges, and our negotiation of them, on the one hand, and discrimination, on the other. Our identities are reflective and constitutive of systems of oppression. Racism requires white privilege. Sexism requires male privilege. Homophobia requires heterosexual privilege. The very intelligibility of our identities is their association, or lack thereof, with privilege. This creates an obligation on the part of those of us with privileged identities to expose and to challenge them.

Significantly, this obligation exists not only as a matter of morality and responsibility. The obligation exists for a pragmatic reason as well. We cannot change the macro-effects of discrimination without ameliorating the power effects of our identities. Nor can our political commitments have traction unless we apply them to the seemingly “just personal” privileged aspects of our lives. Resistance to identity privileges may be futile, we cannot know for sure. However, to the extent that we do nothing, this much is clear: we perpetuate the systems of discrimination out of which our identities are forged.

But precisely what constitutes an identity privilege? Further, how do we identify them? And, finally, what acts are necessary to deprive our identities and to disrupt their association with power. These questions drive this essay. . . .

HETEROSEXUAL PRIVILEGES

Like maleness, heterosexuality should be critically examined. Like maleness, heterosexuality operates as an identity norm, the “what is” or “what is supposed to be” of sexuality. This is illustrated, for example, by the nature versus nurture debate. The question about the cause of sexuality is almost always formulated in terms of whether homosexuality is or is not biologically determined rather than whether sexual orientation, which includes heterosexuality, is or is not biologically determined. Scientists are searching for a gay, not a heterosexual or sexual orientation, gene. Like female identity, then, homosexuality signifies “difference”—more specifically, sexual identity distinctiveness. The normativity of heterosexuality requires that homosexuality be specified, pointed out. Heterosexuality is always already presumed.

Heterosexuals should challenge the normativity and normalization of heterosexuality. They should challenge the heterosexual presumption. But heterosexuals might be reluctant to do so to the extent that they perceive such challenges to call into question their (hetero)sexual orientation. As Lee Edelman observes in a related context, there “is a deeply rooted concern on the part of . . . heterosexual males about the possible meanings of [men subverting gender roles]” (1990, 50). According to Edelman, heterosexual men consider certain gender role inversions to be potentially dangerous because they portend not only a “[male] feminization that would destabilize or question gender” but also a “feminization that would challenge one’s (hetero)sexuality” (1990, 50). Edelman’s observations suggest that straight men may want to preserve what I am calling the “heterosexual presumption.” Their investment in this presumption is less a function of what heterosexuality signifies in a positive sense and more a function of what it signifies in the negative—*not* being homosexual.

And there are racial dimensions to male investment in heterosexuality. For example, straight black male strategies to avoid homosexual suspicion could relate to the racial

aspects of male privileges: heterosexual privilege is one of the few privileges that some black men have. These black men may want to take comfort in the fact that whatever else is going on in their lives, they are not, finally, “sissies,” “punks,” “faggots.” By this I do not mean to suggest that black male heterosexuality has the normative standing of white male heterosexuality. It does not. Straight black men continue to be perceived as heterosexually deviant (overly sexual; potential rapists) and heterosexually irresponsible (jobless fathers of children out of wedlock). Still, black male heterosexuality is closer to white male heterosexual normalcy and normativity than is black gay sexuality. Consequently, some straight (or closeted) black men will want to avoid the “black gay [male] . . . triple negation” to which Marlon Riggs refers in the following quote: “Because of my sexuality I cannot be Black. A strong, proud, ‘Afrocentric’ black man is resolutely heterosexual, not even bisexual. . . . Hence I remain a sissy, punk, faggot. I cannot be a black gay man because, by the tenets of black macho, a black gay man is a triple negation” (1999, 307) . . .

Keith Boykin, former director of the Black Gay and Lesbian Leadership Forum, maintains that “heterosexual sexual orientation has become so ingrained in our social custom, so destigmatized of our fears about sex, that we often fail to make any connection between heterosexuality and sex” (1997). Boykin is only half right. The socially constructed normalcy of heterosexuality is not due solely to the desexualization of heterosexuality in mainstream political and popular culture. It is due also to the sexualization of heterosexuality as normative and to the gender-norm presumptions about heterosexuality—that it is the normal way sexually to express one’s gender.

Moreover, it is not simply that homosexuality is sexed that motivates or stimulates homophobic fears about gay and lesbian relationships. These fears also relate to the fact that homosexuality is stigmatized and is perceived to be an abnormal way sexually to express one’s gender. The disparate social meanings that attach to gay and lesbian identities on the one hand and straight identities on the other make individual acts of heterosexual signification a cause for concern.

Recently, I participated in a workshop where one of the presenters “came out” as a heterosexual in the context of giving his talk. This sexual identity disclosure engendered a certain amount of whispering in the back row. Up until that moment, I think many people had assumed the presenter was gay. After all, he was sitting on a panel discussing sexual orientation and had participated in the Gay and Lesbian section of the American Association of Law Schools. There were three other heterosexuals on the panel, but everyone knew they were not gay because everyone *knew* them; they had all been in teaching for a while, two were very senior, and everyone knew of their spouses or partners. Everyone also knew that there was a lesbian on the panel. She, too, had been in teaching for some time and had been out for many years. Apparently, few of the workshop participants knew very much about the presenter who “came out.” Because “there is a widespread assumption in both gay and straight communities that any man who says something supportive about issues of concern to lesbian or gay communities must be gay himself,” there was, at the very least, a question about his sexuality. Whatever his intentions were for “coming out,” whatever his motivations, his assertion of heterosexuality removed the question. . . .

I became sensitized to the politics of heterosexuals “coming out” in the context of reading about James Baldwin. Try to find a piece written about Baldwin and count the number of lines before the author comes out as heterosexual. Usually, it is not more than a couple of paragraphs, so the game ends fast. The following introduction from a 1994 essay about Baldwin is one example of what I am talking about: “The last time I saw James Baldwin was late autumn of 1985, when my wife and I attended a sumptuous book party” (Forrest 1994, 267). In this case, the game ends immediately. Independent of any question of intentionality on the author’s part, the mention of the wife functions as an identity signifier to subtextually “out” his heterosexuality. *We read* “wife,” *we think* heterosexual.

My point here is not to suggest that the essay's overall tone is heterosexually defensive; I simply find it suspicious when heterosexuals speak of their spouses so quickly (in this case the very first sentence of the essay) when a subject (a topic or a personality—here, James Baldwin) implicates homosexuality. . . . The author engages in what I call “the politics of the 3Ds”—disassociation, disidentification, and differentiation. The author is “different” from Baldwin (the author sleeps with women), and this difference, based as it is on sexual identity, compels the author to disassociate himself from and disidentify with that which makes Baldwin “different” (Baldwin sleeps with men).

Heterosexual significations need not always reflect the politics of the 3Ds. In other words, the possibility exists for heterosexuals to point out their heterosexuality without reauthenticating heterosexuality. Consider, for example, the heterosexual privilege list that I give below. While each item on the list explicitly names—outs—heterosexuality, in none of the items does heterosexuality remain unproblematically normative.

As a prelude to the list, I should be clear that the list is incomplete. Nor do the privileges reflected in it represent the experiences of all heterosexuals. As Bruce Ryder observes: “Male heterosexual privilege has different effects on men of, for example, different races and classes. . . . In our society, the dominant or ‘hegemonic’ form of masculinity to which other masculinities are subordinated is white, middleclass, and heterosexual. This means that the heterosexual privilege of, say, straight black men takes a very different shape in their lives than it does for straight white men” (1991, 292). My goal in presenting this list, then, is not to represent every heterosexual man. Instead, the purpose is to intervene in the normalization of heterosexual privileges. With this intervention, I hope to challenge the pervasive tendency of heterosexuals to see homophobia as something that puts others at a disadvantage and not something that actually advantages them.

HETEROSEXUAL PRIVILEGES: A LIST

1. Whether on television or in the movies, (white) heterosexuality is always affirmed as healthy and/or normal (black heterosexuality and family arrangements are still, to some degree, perceived to be deviant).
2. Without making a special effort, heterosexuals are surrounded by other heterosexuals every day.
3. A husband and wife can comfortably express affection in any social setting, even a predominantly gay one.
4. The children of a heterosexual couple will not have to explain why their parents have different genders—that is, why they have a mummy and a daddy.
5. (White) heterosexuals are not blamed for creating and spreading the AIDS virus (though Africans—as a collective group—are blamed).
6. Heterosexuals do not have to worry about people trying to “cure” their sexual orientation (though black people have to worry about people trying to “cure” black “racial pathologies”).
7. Black heterosexual males did not have to worry about whether they would be accepted at the Million Man March.
8. Rarely, if ever, will a doctor, on learning that her patient is heterosexual, inquire as to whether the patient has ever taken an AIDS test and if so, how recently.
9. Medical service will never be denied to heterosexuals because they are heterosexuals (though medical services may not be recommended to black people because they are black).
10. Friends of heterosexuals generally do not refer to heterosexuals as their “straight friends” (though nonblack people often to refer to black people as their “black friends”).

11. A heterosexual couple can enter a restaurant on their anniversary and be fairly confident that staff and fellow diners will warmly congratulate them if an announcement is made (though the extent of the congratulation and the nature of the welcome might depend on the racial identities of the couple).
12. White heterosexuals do not have to worry about whether a fictional film villain who is heterosexual will reflect negatively on their heterosexuality (though blacks may always have to worry about their racial representation in films).
13. Heterosexuals are entitled to legal recognition of their marriages throughout the United States and the world.
14. Within the black community, black male heterosexuality does not engender comments like "what a waste," "there goes another good black man," or "if they're not in jail, they're faggots."
15. Heterosexuals can take jobs with most companies without worrying about whether their spouses will be included in the benefits package.
16. Child molestation by heterosexuals does not confirm the deviance of heterosexuality (though if the alleged molester is black, the alleged molestation becomes evidence of the deviance of black [hetero]sexuality).
17. Black rap artists do not make songs suggesting that heterosexuals should be shot or beaten up because they are heterosexuals.
18. Black male heterosexuality does not undermine a black heterosexual male's ability to be a role model for black boys.
19. Heterosexuals can join the military without concealing their sexual identity.
20. Children will be taught in school, explicitly or implicitly, about the naturalness of heterosexuality (they will also be taught to internalize the notion of white normativity).
21. Conversations on black liberation will always include concerns about heterosexual men.
22. Heterosexuals can adopt children without being perceived as selfish and without anyone questioning their motives.
23. Heterosexuals are not denied custody or visitation rights of their children because they are heterosexuals.
24. Heterosexual men are welcomed as leaders of Boy Scout troops.
25. Heterosexuals can visit their parents and family as who they are, and take their spouses, partners, or dates with them to family functions.
26. Heterosexuals can talk matter-of-factly about their relationships with their partners without people commenting that they are "flaunting" their sexuality.
27. A black heterosexual couple would be welcomed as members of any black church.
28. Heterosexual couples do not have to worry about whether kissing each other in public or holding hands in public will render them vulnerable to violence.
29. Heterosexuals do not have to struggle with "coming out" or worry about being "outed."
30. The parents of heterosexuals do not love them "in spite of" their sexual orientation, and parents do not blame themselves for their children's heterosexuality.
31. Heterosexuality is affirmed in most religious traditions.
32. Heterosexuals can introduce their spouses to colleagues and not worry about whether the decision will have a detrimental impact on their careers.
33. A black heterosexual male does not have to choose between being black and being heterosexual.
34. Heterosexuals can prominently display their spouses' photographs at work without causing office gossip or hostility.
35. (White) heterosexuals do not have to worry about "positively" representing heterosexuality.

36. Few will take pity on a heterosexual on hearing that she is straight, or feel the need to say, "That's okay" (though it is not uncommon for a black person to hear, "It's okay that you're black" or "We don't care that you're black" or "When we look at you, we don't see a black person").
37. (Male) heterosexuality is not considered to be symptomatic of the "pathology" of the black family.
38. Heterosexuality is never mistaken as the only aspect of one's lifestyle, but is perceived instead as merely one more component of one's personal identity.
39. (White) heterosexuals do not have to worry over the impact their sexuality will have personally on their children's lives, particularly as it relates to their social lives (though black families of all identity configurations do have to worry about how race and racism will affect their children's well-being).
40. Heterosexuals do not have to worry about being "bashed" after leaving a social event with other heterosexuals (though black people of all sexual orientations do have to worry about being "racially bashed" on any given day).
41. Every day is (white) "Heterosexual Pride Day."

CONCLUSION: RESISTING PRIVILEGES

I have argued that one of the ways to contest gender and sexual orientation hierarchy is for heterosexual men to detail their social experiences on the privileged side of gender and sexual orientation. In advancing this argument, I do not mean to suggest that the role of these men is to legitimize "untrustworthy" and "self-interested" victim-centered accounts of discrimination. There is a tendency on the part of dominant groups (e.g., males and heterosexuals) to discount the experiences of subordinate groups (e.g., straight women, lesbians, and gays) unless those experiences are authenticated or legitimized by a member of the dominant group. For example, it is one thing for me, a black man, to say I experienced discrimination in a particular social setting; it is quite another for my white male colleague to say he witnessed that discrimination. My telling of the story is suspect because I am black (racially interested). My white colleague's telling of the story is not suspect because he is white (racially disinterested). The racial transparency of whiteness—its "perspectivelessness"—renders my colleague's account "objective." . . .

Assuming that the identification/listing of privileges methodology I have described avoids the problem of authentication, one still might wonder whether the project is sufficiently radical to dismantle gender and sexual orientation hierarchies. Certainly the lists I have presented do not go far enough. They represent the very early stages in a more complicated process to end gender and sexual orientation discrimination.

The lists, nevertheless, are politically valuable. . . .

None of this is to say that awareness and acknowledgement of privilege is enough. Resistance is needed as well. But how does one resist? And what counts as resistance? With respect to marriage, for example, does resistance to heterosexual privilege require heterosexuals to refrain from getting married and/or attending weddings? It might mean both of those things. At the very least, resistance to identity privilege would seem to require "critical acquiescence": criticizing, if not rejecting, aspects of our life that are directly linked to our privilege. A heterosexual who gets married and/or attends weddings but who also openly challenges the idea that marriage is a heterosexual entitlement is engaging in critical acquiescence.

In the end, critical acquiescence might not go far enough. It might even be a cop out. Still, it is a useful and politically manageable place to begin.

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Sport

Where Men Are Men and Women Are Trespassers

Pat Griffin

... Sport is more than games. As an institution, sport serves important social functions in supporting conventional social values. In particular, sport is a training ground where boys learn what it means to be men. Masculinity does not come naturally; it must be carefully taught. Specific rewards and punishments provide clear messages about acceptable and unacceptable behavior for boys. Boys who show an interest in "girl" activities, such as playing with dolls, dancing, or cooking, are teased by peers. Young boys learn at an early age that participation in athletics is an important, if not required, part of developing a masculine identity and gaining acceptance among peers.

Every Saturday morning in the fall little boys stagger up and down fields under the weight of full football drag, imitating the swagger and ritual they see in their professional sports heroes. Many fathers worry if their sons do not exhibit an interest in sports. They teach their sons to throw, catch, swing bats, shoot hoops. Adults comment on the size of young boys by predicting in which sports they will excel. Participation on school athletic teams, especially the big four (football, basketball, baseball, and ice hockey) ensure popularity and prestige among classmates and in the larger community. Young boys idolize professional and college team-sport athletes and coaches because of their physical size, strength, toughness, and competitiveness. Young boys and adult men wear caps, T-shirts, and jackets with their favorite professional or collegiate team mascot and colors.

Men's athletic events, especially the big four team sports, draw huge numbers of spectators. Men of all colors and social classes study team statistics and participate in intense postcontest analyses of strategy and performance. Cities spend millions of dollars building sports arenas with tax subsidies to woo men's professional teams to town or prevent them from moving to another city. The athletic equipment and clothing industries are multibillion-dollar enterprises that depend on the large number of boys and men who buy their increasingly sophisticated and specialized products.

The importance of sport in socializing men into traditional masculine gender roles also defines the sport experience for women. Because sport is identified with men and masculinity, women in sport become trespassers on male territory, and their access is limited or blocked entirely. Despite huge increases in women's sport participation, there is still tremendous resistance to an equitable distribution of resources between men's and women's athletics. *USA Today* reported that on the 25th anniversary of the passage of Title IX, the federal law prohibiting sex discrimination in education, 80 percent of college and university athletic programs in the United States are still not in compliance with the law.

Sometimes resistance to women's sport participation is more personal. In the spring of 1997 Melissa Raglin, 12, was the starting catcher for a Boca Raton Babe Ruth baseball team. During a game the plate umpire asked Melissa if she was wearing a protective cup. Melissa removed her helmet and catcher's mask and told him she was a girl. However, the Babe Ruth rules state that all players (assumed to be male) must wear a cup to protect their genitals. When Melissa, who had been playing in the Babe Ruth league for over two seasons, refused to comply with the rule, she was prohibited from playing catcher. She was allowed to play again only when she ordered a special cup designed for women, even though most doctors agree that there is no medical reason why a girl should wear a protective cup. This example shows the absurd lengths to which some men will go to try to humiliate a young girl to make sure she knows that she is trespassing on male turf. Male league officials' insistence that Melissa wear a cup, even at the risk of ridicule in news stories, demonstrates the seriousness and importance of protecting sport from female encroachment.

Women's presence in sport as serious participants dilutes the importance and exclusivity of sport as a training ground for learning about and accepting traditional male gender roles and the privileges that their adoption confers on (white, heterosexual) men. As a result, women's sport performance is trivialized and marginalized as an inferior version of the "real thing." These arguments ignore the overlap in sport performances among men and women in all sports and the growing interest among young girls in sport participation.

Sexism as a system of male privilege and female subordination is based on the acceptance of particular definitions of gender (what constitutes a man or a woman) and gender roles (what qualities, talents, and characteristics women and men are supposed to have). Women's serious participation in sport brings into question the "natural" and mutually exclusive nature of gender and gender roles. If women in sport can be tough minded, competitive, and muscular too, then sport loses its special place in the development of masculinity for men. If women can so easily develop these so-called masculine qualities, then what are the meanings of femininity and masculinity? What does it mean to be a man or a woman? These challenges threaten an acceptance of the traditional gender order in which men are privileged and women are subordinate. Thus, they account for much of the strong resistance to gender equity in sport and the need to marginalize and control the growth of women's athletics.

THE POWER OF THE LESBIAN LABEL

One of the most effective means of controlling women in sport is to challenge the femininity and heterosexuality of women athletes. When a woman is called "masculine," "unfeminine," or "dyke," she knows she has crossed a gender boundary or challenged male privilege. In this way, homophobia serves as glue that holds traditional gender role expectations in place. Because most women are afraid to be called lesbian or to have their femininity called into question, their sport experience can be controlled by using the lesbian label to

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intimidate them. The purpose of calling a woman a lesbian is to limit her sport experience and make her feel defensive about her athleticism.

Though lesbians are the direct targets of these insinuations, antilesbian bias affects the experience of all women. Using the lesbian label to discourage the bonding that occurs among women in athletics is an effective way to keep women from discovering their own power. Consequently, stigmatizing lesbian identity serves the interests of those who want to maintain the imbalance of opportunity and power in athletics based on gender. As long as women's sports are associated with lesbians and lesbians are stigmatized as sexual and social deviants, the lesbian label serves an important social-control function in sport, ensuring that only men have access to the benefits of sport participation and the physical and psychological empowerment available in sport.

The preservation of athletics as a male-only activity is essential in maintaining a gender order in which men and women adopt separate and unequal gender roles. The interconnections of sexism, homophobia, and heterosexism are powerful forces that ensure that male privilege and dominance endure.

SPORT AND THE MAINTENANCE OF MASCULINITY

Sport for men serves five social functions that ensure that the gender order supporting presumed male superiority and female subordination is maintained. These functions are (1) defining and reinforcing traditional conceptions of masculinity, (2) providing an acceptable and safe context for male bonding and intimacy, (3) reinforcing male privilege and female subordination, (4) establishing status among other males, and (5) reinforcing heterosexuality.

DEFINING AND REINFORCING TRADITIONAL CONCEPTIONS OF MASCULINITY

Team sports in particular teach boys masculinity skills. They learn to be competitive and tough. They learn to deny feelings of compassion or other feelings that coaches teach them to associate with weakness. Boys learn to value physical strength and size, aggressiveness, and a will to dominate. Young boys learn to accept the necessity of establishing hierarchical relationships among competitors and teammates based on athletic performance. None of these qualities or values are innate, but young boys learn that they are essential and natural components of a masculine identity. Boys who are perceived to be weak or soft or who do not have an interest in developing these traditional masculine qualities are shunned, harassed, and ridiculed by peers. Adult men who were labeled "sissy" in elementary school or "faggot" and "pussy" in later grades can tell painful stories of abuse that attest to the intensity of this socialization process.

Much of this harassment takes place on athletic teams and in physical education classes. Male coaches and physical educators are important teachers of masculinity. Lessons learned on the athletic field reinforce the importance of learning to "be a man." "Proving one's manhood," facing challenge "like a man," and dominating opponents represent a hard strength and stoicism especially prized in team sports.

Not all men in sport can easily meet the standards of masculinity set in athletics. Gay men, men of color, and poor and working-class men represent what Connell calls *competing masculinities*. Their experiences of masculinity are mediated by their race, sexual identity, and class status. Because their social group memberships deviate from the white, heterosexual, and middle-class norm, these men have less access to privilege even though

they might excel in sport. A gay male athlete must hide his identity. An African-American male athlete is stereotyped by racist expectations and disadvantaged by institutional racism. These competing masculinities also enable these men to create a different approach to the development of masculinity, as in the ironic stance of the gay male athlete described by Pronger.

PROVIDING A CONTEXT FOR ACCEPTABLE AND SAFE MALE BONDING AND INTIMACY

Athletics is one of the few social contexts in which men can openly express physical affection and love for other men. Team members spend an enormous amount of time together during the course of a season, practicing and competing, traveling to games, spending nights in hotels, and socializing. The emotional intensity of competition and sharing the highs and lows of winning and losing encourage strong bonds among teammates. . . .

In addition to this emotional bond, athletics involves physical intimacy as well. Participating in team sports in particular requires physical contact with both teammates and opponents. In addition, athletes spend a lot of time together in hotel rooms, locker rooms, showers, and whirlpool baths—all places that suggest a high degree of physical closeness or nudity. During victory celebrations men can, without fear of ridicule, hug and kiss each other. Men can also cry without shame about losing a big game. Fanny slaps and chest bumps are commonplace in men's athletics, especially in team sports. It is not a coincidence that expressions of male-to-male physical affection and love are acceptable in few other contexts. In athletics men can admire other men's bodies and their physical accomplishments openly without arousing suspicions about their heterosexuality. The bond among male teammates is an important lesson in male solidarity around their masculine identities. . . .

REINFORCING MALE PRIVILEGE AND FEMALE INFERIORITY

Defining masculinity is as much about rejecting so-called feminine qualities as it is about embracing so-called masculine ones. Male coaches send strong messages about women and about the need for men to avoid being like women when they compare a poor performance by a male athlete to that of a girl (for example, throwing like a girl). Many coaches know they can inspire male athletes to perform better by calling them demeaning names intended for women (pussies) or hybrids like wussy (wimp and pussy). Being called a woman, compared to a woman, or—the worst insult—being beaten by a woman in any sport contest provokes anger and shame in many men and boys. . . .

As Mariah Burton Nelson points out in her insightful book *The Stronger Women Get, The More Men Love Football*, many men need to establish the "fact" that no matter what gains women make in sport, they could never play football. They believe that football is the epitome of athletic excellence and legitimacy. In New Jersey a female member of a high school football team was physically assaulted by her male team-mates who were trying to dissuade her from playing. Elizabeth Balsley was punched, hit with blocking dummies, and spat upon as she walked toward the practice field. Three of her male teammates were charged with assault, suspended from classes for two to four days, and barred from playing in one football game. . . . As this incident illustrates, young women who dare to challenge the notion that football is too tough for women must be taught a lesson.

This need to establish male superiority extends beyond comparing the performance merits of male and female athletes. Studies of talk in men's locker rooms describe consistent patterns of antiwoman and antigay interactions. Many men talk about women as sexual possessions or receptacles, not as equals or even as human beings. In this climate

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male athletes learn to despise qualities within themselves that they perceive to be feminine and to accept female inferiority in sport as fact. They develop a sense of entitlement and superiority in relationship to women on and off the athletic field. . . .

A study by Crosset, Benedict, and McDonald indicates that there is a higher incidence of violence against women by male athletes than by other men on college campuses. Athletic team participation in gang rapes or the development of a scoring system to rank sexual conquests are disturbing examples of how bonding among male athletes based on contempt for women can lead to antisocial criminal behaviors. . . .

ESTABLISHING STATUS AMONG OTHER MALES

Sport is the single most important element of the peer-status system for U.S. adolescent males. Moreover, athletics is a rehearsal for the status many white, middle-class boys hope to achieve later through work, education, and economic accumulation. Poor, working-class men of all colors often view success as a professional athlete as the only route, no matter how unrealistic, to economic success and social status. As a result, athletics takes on a special status in the culture of boys and young men. Messner describes how boys learn that acceptance by and status with peers, fathers, and coaches is achieved by winning in sports. According to Messner, boys learn that just participating in sports is not enough. To achieve the kind of attention and connections they seek, it is necessary to be better than other boys, to beat them in sports. In high school and college, male athletes, particularly team-sport athletes, are often treated as high-status members of the community by peers, teachers, and other community members. As such, they often receive special treatment and recognition not given to other boys. . . . Being judged acceptable in this public sport-performance hierarchy is an important ritual in establishing self-worth among boys and young men. Sport for boys is serious business, and girls have no place in it.

REINFORCING HETEROSEXUALITY

For many people the male team-sports hero is the epitome of masculinity: strong, tough, handsome, competitive, dating or married to the most desirable woman. An accepted perquisite of professional athletic fame for men is a rich and varied sex life with many willing young female groupies. Many people believe that the terms *gay man* and *athlete* used together are an oxymoron. A gay male athlete violates both the image of male athletes as strong, virile, and heterosexual and the image of gay men as swishy and effeminate. Just as it is important to keep women out of sport or marginalized in sport, it is essential to keep gay men in sport invisible. If gay men can be strong, tough, competitive, and part of a male bonding experience in the locker room with straight men, how can straight men confidently differentiate themselves from gay men? Just as young men in athletics learn that women are inferior, they also learn that gay men are contemptible. Being called a "faggot" or "pansy" is an insult of the highest order to one's sense of masculinity. The incidence of antigay talk in locker rooms and the participation of male athletes in gay bashing reflect this attitude.

Maintaining the myths that all male athletes are heterosexual and that sexual attraction among male athletes does not occur allow men to enjoy the physical and emotional intimacy of the athletic team experience. They do not need to worry that teammates might think they are gay. These myths also protect male athletes from confronting the possibility that someone else in that locker room might be gay. Many heterosexual men are extremely uncomfortable with the possibility of being the object of another man's sexual interest. By displaying contempt for gays through antigay name-calling, jokes, harassment, or violence, men reassure themselves and teammates that everyone in the locker room is heterosexual

in an intimate all-male context. If this illusion is threatened by the presence of openly gay men, the complex feelings of love and intimacy, physical contact, and communal nudity could not be enjoyed without fear and suspicion. The fear of being perceived as gay or being the object of gay sexual desire is a powerful social control that keeps men in athletics safely within the bounds of traditional masculinity.

This need to believe that there are no gay men present in the locker room or on the playing field makes the male athletic environment extremely hostile for openly gay athletes and coaches. . . . A closeted gay athlete can participate without suspicion, as long as he is willing to keep his identity a secret. Being an athlete is so consistent with traditional masculine and heterosexual expectations for men that gay athletes can pass if they are willing to. While women athletes must constantly prove their heterosexuality, most people assume that male athletes are heterosexual unless they provide evidence that they are not. . . .

Defenders of a sexist and heterosexist status quo are right to fear the potential that sport has for the empowerment of women. Sport can be a catalyst for empowering women to become the center of their own experience, whether demanding equal access to resources; making connections among sexism, racism, and heterosexism; developing and reveling in their own strength and physical competence; or falling in love with a teammate. When women take sport participation seriously, it is, as Mariah Burton Nelson asserts, a feminist activity: "All of us collectively, are a threat—not to men exactly, but to male privilege and to masculinity as defined through manly sport." . . .

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The Loving Decision

Anna Quinlan

Same-sex marriage was beaten back at the ballot box. Now here's a history lesson on why victory is inevitable in the long run.

One of my favorite Supreme Court cases is *Loving v. Virginia*, and not just because it has a name that would delight any novelist. It's because it reminds me, when I'm downhearted, of the truth of the sentiment at the end of "Angels in America," Tony Kushner's brilliant play: "The world only spins forward."

Here are the facts of the case, and if they leave you breathless with disbelief and rage it only proves Kushner's point, and mine: Mildred Jeter and Richard Loving got married in Washington, D.C. They went home to Virginia, there to be rousted out of their bed one night by police and charged with a felony. The felony was that Mildred was black and Richard was white and they were therefore guilty of miscegenation, which is a \$10 word for bigotry. Virginia, like a number of other states, considered cross-racial matrimony a crime at the time. It turned out that it wasn't just the state that hated the idea of black people marrying white people. God was onboard, too, according to the trial judge, who wrote, "The fact that He separated the races shows that he did not intend for the races to mix." But the Supreme Court, which eventually heard the case, passed over the Almighty for the Constitution, which luckily has an equal-protection clause. "Marriage is one of the basic civil rights of man," the unanimous opinion striking down the couple's conviction said, "fundamental to our very existence and survival." That was in 1967.