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Homophobia Stems from Female Subordination

A man wearing makeup can walk down Vermont Avenue in West Hollywood, but the same action in suburban Orange County could provoke dangerous reactions, due to the common association of feminine traits with gay men. Homophobic people, therefore, would see this man as an absurd deviant that must be confronted. Planned Parenthood, an American organization that provides reproductive care and sexual education, defines homophobia as “the fear, hatred, discomfort with, or mistrust of people who are lesbian, gay, or bisexual”. As much as it can be extreme and often fatal for gay victims, homophobic people justify themselves with various reasons such as false religious teachings, baseless rumors, or natural order. Interestingly, similar claims can be found in sexism. In this patriarchal Western society, women have been subject to misogyny from the very beginning. Misogynist men crave a traditional household with conservative values where women serve men. Therefore, they complain about modern women being less subservient in a marriage as well as being competitive in the workforce. They stand firm on baseless claims that undervalue women and see feminist movement as an unnatural order. The attacks on women and gay people share a common enemy of prejudice towards gender and sexual minorities. Homophobia indirectly attacks women by degrading femininity, condemning lesbianism, and reinforcing social control.

To start, homophobia attacks women by degrading femininity through slurs. The language is the evidence. For instance, little boys in kindergarten would see their peers being feminine or

soft and call them gay as an insult. They would see a boy learning to run and shout that he runs like a girl, so he must be gay. The assumptions that they are socialized to make is wild and ridiculous. Softness, therefore, is associated with weakness or femininity, and a feminine boy is viewed as voluntarily giving up his ideal masculine power. Moreover, this way of thinking does not really go away among the adults either. An angry individual can yell at someone to perform oral sex on a man as an insult, but it does not really work the other way around. This is because being in the position to perform oral sex on a man is widely considered shameful, whereas dominating a woman through performance of oral sex is considered as something to be proud of.

To add on, homophobia degrades femininity by implying that women are subordinate to men. As a result, homophobic people find ways to despise gay men for embracing feminine traits. Effeminate men are ridiculed in social settings for their unmanly behaviors such as being too fashionable. In addition, most heterosexual men consider being penetrated as the end of their pride and masculinity. Hence, they are convinced that it would be a failure of a father to let their future son in a passive position of being dominated by another man. The idea of a man being on the receiving side of sexual intercourse is too much for them to fathom because it symbolizes loss of power and control. Essentially, the patriarchal belief enforces that manhood is always supposed to be dominant, and that it is shameful for a man to be seen as receiving. This establishes the idea of women being inferior for expecting them to be submissive. It creates an impression of feminine inferiority.

Additionally, homophobia condemns both lesbians and non-traditional women by expecting them to need a man in their lives. Behaviors of both demographics do not fit into conservative societal norms. People would see a woman mowing her lawn, minding her own business, and raise questions regarding where her man is. By comparison, people would see a

lesbian couple adopting a joyful child and make statements about the missing father figure. However, they should reconsider how there are many children from heterosexual couples whose father is missing, too. Misogynic men tend to view masculine lesbians as a threat to, what they consider, their authority and role in a traditional household. People who ask lesbian couples, “Who is the man of the relationship?”, might as well ask who holds the power in the relationship. Such a question may seem simply ignorant, but in reality, it is a snide remark coming from deep-rooted homophobia and sexism because it is essentially asking, “Who is protecting you, weak women?” The idea of a household requiring a man is linked to the myth of two women not being complete without a man. In short, homophobia towards lesbians pushes the belief that a woman needs a man to depend on, and vice versa.

Furthermore, both heterosexual and homosexual women share matching scars from homophobia condemning lesbians. Masculine power in patriarchy is based on the narrative of some vile men being the assailants of women, while the remaining white knights take the role of protectors from such assailants at the same time (Alcoff 286). Therefore, two women together, surviving lives on their own without a man, annihilates this narrative. In extreme cases, lesbians are subject to corrective rape, an act of penetration by a man to cure the wrong sexual orientation of a woman. For example, in a South African news article reported by a journalist, Zara Nicholson, there is a case of a 30-year-old lesbian, Millicent Gaika, being raped by a man who asserted that “I know you are a lesbian. You are not a man, you think you are, but I am going to show you, you are a woman. I am going to make you pregnant. I am going to kill you” (qtd. in Swarr 961). The threats he made were indeed chilling. His statements show how his homophobic belief of lesbians replacing or becoming the role of a man is tied to his misogynist view of putting a woman back to their place by forcing her to submit to him as a sex object for impregnation. He believed that by

making her pregnant like a traditional woman is expected to be, she would be cured of her supposedly false idea of acting like a man, and having sexual attraction towards other women. The horrible reality is that many men under patriarchy may share similar mindsets. This example highlighted how homophobia towards lesbians relates to the very hatred towards women who are considered as second-class citizens.

Ultimately, homophobia is reinforcing social control over people with deviant behaviors. People enforce the traditional norms of society by, for example, giving weird looks to a happy gay couple walking by at the mall with hands intertwined. Bigots would call it shoving it down at their throats even though public display of affection is common among heterosexual couples, too. Conservatives panic in such a scenario because they do not want their children to get the wrong idea. They hold firm belief that homosexuality is a contagious choice. Therefore, they try to halt this abnormality through peer-pressure and laws. Recently, the Supreme Court, under the Trump administration, has been asked to overturn the decision of legalizing same-sex marriage (Marimow). This is a critical attempt to strip gay people off their rights to marry who they love.

In addition to reinforcing social control towards gay people, women are similarly controlled by the law. For instance, a woman who became pregnant as a result of being raped may not even have full clinical support to have an abortion depending on where they live. Choosing to have an abortion is a matter of health and financial concerns. Even though it should be the sole decision of a woman to choose whether or not she feels ready to have a baby, society believes that they can tell a woman what to do with her unborn child. Hence, the Supreme Court of the United States in 2022 has overturned the 50-year-old decision that legalized abortion nationwide (Liptak). Depending on the states they live in, women in America may not even have full control over their body. The comparisons between gay people and women, being deprived of their rights by the law,

are awfully similar because they share a common enemy of control. Freedom of expression is legally challenged nationwide in order to put people in their places. The tendency to have control over someone else's sexual orientation, in a way, leads to the desire to have control over other people of different genders.

On the other hand, conservative people insist that a traditional family is only natural, and that they are not being sexist for claiming homosexuality is unnatural. However, one study on the relationship between sexism and homophobia, conducted in Turkey by professors of Psychology, have shown that levels of homophobia is directly proportional to levels of sexism (Set and Ergin 113). Homophobia, therefore, is undeniably linked to sexism. The idea of a nuclear family, with a dad and a housekeeper mom, puts people in roles where they are expected to belong. It comes with sexist norms. Conservatives might not directly claim that women belong in the kitchen, but they would teach their daughter to cook and clean well to find a good husband. Thus, a typical Thanksgiving party with aunts, mothers, and daughters making food in the kitchen while the uncles, dads, and brothers stream sports together on the couch may feel natural, but it is, in fact, quite unfair. Women should not be expected or peer-pressured into being subservient to men simply because the latter may provide financial support. Moreover, such an instance of women in the kitchen with their male partners having fun outdoors would not work at all with same-sex couples. This is the reason why homophobic people see gay marriage as a violation of societal norms (Set and Ergin 117). They normalize a conventional household where a wife is expected to serve her husband and kids. Therefore, challenging the idea of a traditional family is the only way to eradicate both homophobia and sexism.

Embracing femininity would alleviate homophobia in society. Homophobia is usually a direct attack on men, but it is also indirectly attacking women, because it creates an impression of

femininity being inferior, it challenges lesbians and their ability to survive without a man, and it controls people by depriving them of freedom of choice. Homophobic people tend to see femininity as a sign of weakness. However, femininity is not less or more. It is inherently just as significant as masculinity. Therefore, feminine words or sexual orientation terms are not to be used as slurs or insults. Moreover, homophobia rejects the nature of lesbians by insisting that a woman always needs a man. As much as it challenges the power dynamics of a typical marriage, women can choose to marry whomever they wish or none at all. At the end of the day, homophobia is a form of attempted control over non-traditional people. Same-sex marriages break the sexist norms of a conventional family. Therefore, an attack on homosexuality is basically to keep a traditional family with an obedient wife. Homophobia and sexism may seem like two different cases, but these topics are intertwined together for their common root cause is the same. It is of utmost importance to challenge the myths of the patriarchal society, and let people live.

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