

Gender and Peace Building

Independent Research Project

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Gender Outside of Heterosexuality

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What is heterosexuality and what does it mean to be a female or male outside the institution of heterosexuality? Current ideas on gender identity, femininity and masculinity are heavily aligned to straight sexuality; this is seen through media, education, religion, history. How is ones gender identity formed for individuals who do not identify with heterosexuality? What is the impact of heterosexuality and gender roles? These are the questions I explore in this independent research project.

This Research Project is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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Chapter 1: What is Heterosexuality?

Heterosexuality is the dominant sexual discourse of our society. Since it is the dominant discourse, it tends not to be looked at or examined. Instead it is taken as a constant in our society, a fact. Men and women are presumed heterosexual until they state otherwise. So let's explore heterosexuality. We will do this first by looking at the current definitions for heterosexuality. According to Merriam-Webster dictionary the definition of heterosexuality is broken down as follows:

Main Entry: **het·ero·sex·u·al**

Pronunciation: \,he-tə-rō-'sek-sh(ə-)wəl, -'sek-shəl\

Function: adjective

Etymology: International Scientific Vocabulary

Date: 1892

1 a : of, relating to, or characterized by a tendency to direct sexual desire toward the opposite sex **b** : of, relating to, or involving sexual intercourse between individuals of opposite sex
2 : of or relating to different sexes

From this definition we learn two things: one that the origin of the word is scientific dating back to 1892, and second that to be heterosexual one has to be attracted and/or sexually active with someone of the opposite sex. But what makes up one's sex? What defines an opposite sex?

According to Encyclopedia Britannica :

Science terminology: Sex

In both plants and animals, sex is determined by the reproductive cells (gametes) produced by the organism. The male produces [sperm](#) cells, and the female produces [egg](#) cells. Males and females may or may not have apparent structural differences, but they always have functional, hormonal, and chromosomal differences. Patterns of behavior, sometimes elaborate, may also distinguish the sexes in some species

Through this we have a clear understanding of what the definition of heterosexuality is, which is the attraction and or sexually activity between females and males. For the use of this paper we will limit this to human females and males.

Heterosexuality, however, goes beyond just this technical definition. It is not just another key word or phrase that is applied to sexual behavior in humans. It is an institution that is reinforced throughout society. The reason I say institution is because heterosexuality is all around us. It determines the normative in our society. It is the standard by which most people live. To continue in this understanding lets look at the Merriam-Webster dictionary, definition of Institution:

Main Entry: **in·sti·tu·tion**

Pronunciation: \,in(t)-stə-'tü-shən, -'tyü-\

Function: *noun*

Date: 14th century

1 : an act of **instituting** : **ESTABLISHMENT**

2 a : a significant practice, relationship, or organization in a society or culture <the institution of marriage>; *also* : something or someone firmly associated with a place or thing <she has become an institution in the theater> **b** : an established organization or corporation (as a bank or university) especially of a public character.

To apply heterosexuality to an institution may seem extreme at first, but by looking at the definition of institution it is clear that it does apply. The first part of the definition is “an act of instituting: Establishment.” Heterosexuality has been instituted and established in society as the social norm, the dominant sexual discourse, which most people in society live and identify with. The second part of the definition states “A significant practice, relationship or organization in a society or culture...” This applies to heterosexuality as well; it is a practice, a practice of being attracted and or sexual active (one could argue exclusively) to the opposite sex. It is a relationship, between two people and it is organized within our society and culture. The term was originally a scientific term, organizing people into a social constraint, heterosexuality.

To understand the definition and application of the Institution which is heterosexuality, is one thing, to understand where the terminology came from is another.

Where did the Term Heterosexuality come from?

The term heterosexuality has not always been around. As we saw in our definition it was developed in the late nineteenth century. The term itself has only been around for a little over a hundred years. Where did the term come from and how did it become the dominant sexual discourse and institution it is today? According to Jonathan Ned Katz in his book *the Invention of Heterosexuality*, before the discourse of heterosexuality, there was the discourse in Europe and North America of true and false love:

True love was a hierarchical system, topped by an intense spiritual feeling powerful enough to justify marriage, reproduction, and an otherwise unhallowed sensuality. The reigning sexual standard distinguished, not between different-and same-sex eroticism, but between true love and false love-a

feeling not sufficiently deep, permanent, and serious enough to justify the usual sensual courtship practices, or the usual well-nigh immutable marriage (Katz, 1995, p.44).

With the discourse of true love also came the discourse of true men and true women. Katz explains this:

The early nineteenth century prescribed particular ideals of manhood and womanhood, founding a cult of the true man and the true women... the special purity claimed for this era's true women referred not to asexuality but to middle-class women's better control than men over their carnal impulses, often conceived of as weaker than men's. True men, thought to live closer to carnality and in less control of it, ideally aspired to the same rational regulation of concupiscence as did respectable true women (Katz, 1995, p.43-44).

What Katz is explaining is that within this true love discourse there were roles for women and men, based on restraint, not on sexual orientation. He also points out the class divide in this discourse: "Holding strictly to true love was an important way in which the middle class distinguished itself from the allegedly promiscuous upper class and animalistic lower class"(Katz, 1995, p.44) In the Victorian Age, before the term heterosexuality was coined, the social ideals of one's sexuality had to do with true compared to false love. True love, only being between a woman and a man, with social ideals of what true women and true men were, differentiating between the classes, having the strongest hold on the middle class. So how did this change?

According to Katz, in the 1860's a German writer, Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, started to reclassify and organize sexual terms, in defense of same sex love:

In a letter to Ulrichs on May 6, 1868, another early sex law reformer, the writer Karl Maria Kertbeny, is first known to have privately used four new terms he coined... 'Momosexual' refers to masturbation, practiced by both sexes. 'Heterogenit' refers to erotic acts of human beings with animals. "homosexual" refers to erotic acts performed by men with men and women with women. And 'heterosexual' refers to erotic acts of men and women, as did another of his new terms, 'normalsexualitat' normal sexuality (Katz, 1995, p.52)

Karl Maria Kertbeny was Austrian and against the anti-sodomy laws, having had a friend who killed himself after being blackmailed due to his same sex practices. He started writing anonymous pamphlets against the anti-sodomy laws using his new terms (mcm.edu). In essence, the term heterosexuality and homosexuality came out of the defense of same sex love. It was not the terms heterosexual and homosexual that created the divide. It had long been there, the divide being that, opposite sex love/heterosexuality, was and is seen as legitimate while same sex love/homosexuality was seen as evil and now as illegitimate. The reinforcement of opposite sex love as the only rightful love in society had been instituted through different means than the current day one of heterosexuality. Heterosexuality as a lifestyle and the normative ideal took a while to develop.

According to Katz, Sigmund Freud had a big role in the dichotomy and governance of heterosexual/homosexual identity:

The initial appearance of 'heterosexual' in a discussion of homosexuality is a typical practice of Freud's that later becomes typical of others. Heterosexuals, it turns out, most often owe the explicit, public mention of their existence to talk of homosexuals. Though the heterosexual category came to signify the dominant standard, it remained oddly dependent on the subordinate homosexual category. Heterosexual and homosexual appeared in public as Siamese twins, the first good, the second bad, bound together for life in unalterable, antagonistic symbiosis (Katz, 1995,p.65).

Through Sigmund Freud, a leading psychologist of his day, whose findings still hold relevance in the psychiatric sphere and beyond, the ideals of heterosexuality and homosexuality emerge; heterosexuality being the norm and homosexuality being the other: "In Freud's modern usage, hetero *feelings* defines hetero *being*, whether or not one acts heterosexually" (Katz, 1995, p.66). By this, Freud explains that feelings, attraction to the opposite sex means more than the actual acts. So to be heterosexual, one has to feel like a heterosexual, attracted to the opposite sex, the significance being, that for someone who feels attraction to the same sex, even the acts of heterosexuality does not make him or her a heterosexual.

In the book *Masculinities* by R.W. Connell, he explains the impact of the instituting of

Heterosexuality:

As gay historians have shown, the late nineteenth century was the time when 'the homosexual' as a social type became clearly defined. This involved both a medical and a legal discrimination. At earlier periods of history, sodomy had been officially seen as an act which might be undertaken by any man who gave way to evil. Homosexual desire was now viewed as defining a particular type of man, the 'invert' in the most common medical view. New laws criminalized homosexual contact as such (called 'gross indecency' in the 1885 Labouchere Amendment in England), and routine police surveillance of 'perverts' followed (Connell, 1995, p.196).

As Connell further explains the conceptualization of homosexuality started to become a characteristic of someone, instead of an act. Yes, sodomy was outlawed; those who regularly practiced it were in danger of punishment and or blackmail (mcm.edu), but now under the new heterosexual/homosexual discourse the person took on the identity of the act. Heterosexuality and homosexuality are feelings, therefore possessing the person who has them. No longer was someone just succumbing to socially deemed inappropriate acts. They were considered an invert and perverted; it was aligned to the person, who they were, no longer what they did. The opposite- sex love structure has a long history of control and supremacy over all other types; one could argue

dating back to the emergence of patriarchy. For the means of this paper, I will focus on the current state of heterosexuality, understanding that it is the present underpinning of opposite-sex love being the overriding societal normative sexual discourse and impacting and determining the views on other sexual discourses; such as homosexuality.

Current State of Heterosexuality

Heterosexuality is now the modern societal norm of sexuality. But it does not stop at that. The institution and emphasis of the modern interpretation is all around. In our current society there is a dichotomy between heterosexuality and homosexuality, in other words two categories that society pressures people to align too. In modern slang, straight meaning heterosexual and gay meaning homosexual, the question is: Are you straight or gay? This idea of either/or is rigid, leaving little room for people who do not identify with either category. What about people who do not identify with either category, due to their attraction to both sexes, such as bisexuals. Bisexual is another category, but one that does not hold as much legitimacy as heterosexual or homosexual. A lot of the time in today's society, by both straight and gay people, bisexuality is looked at as a phase of straight people or a transition of gay people: "For example, the category of bisexual challenges the binary discourse of the dominant sex/gender system that requires subjects to locate themselves as either gay or straight (Ault, 1996)" (Blume and Blume, p.788, 2003). The questioning of bisexuality highlights the need of society to have men and women align to a category.

When one looks at the current political policies in the United States, the right to gay marriage is still a hot button issue, which people are either for or against. The right for gay's to serve in the military, repealing the "don't ask don't tell" policy, is another heated discussion. The argument over gay rights in numerous countries is still going on. When we look to our media we see heterosexuality and social conditioning on a regular basis. This is done through what is mirrored in TV and movies, which is a straight world. There is representation of homosexuals in movies and TV, but they tend to be side characters, supporters of the main straight character, and their sexuality is a defining trait. In the book *The Male Body*, by Susan Bordo, she comments on the depiction of straight and gay men in the movies:

Straight masculinity could only bend so far. In every film in which the hero treads just a little too close to what straight audiences might identify as the gay man's world- *American Gigolo*, for example (1980), in which Richard Gere plays a narcissistic male prostitute-extra insurance is required to make sure that audiences don't get confused. That might mean making the character ostentatiously heterosexual... In these films, and many others, the homosexual is invisible yet powerfully *present*- as the shadow of the straight man's sexuality, a constant unseen specter, alluded to through jokes and imitations, the figure against which the heroes must establish their difference. When the homosexual

character did appear as a full, flesh-and-blood screen presence, it was as what philosopher Simone de Beauvoir has called “the other.” Unlike straight characters, who get to have exciting adventures in which their sexual orientation is irrelevant, the homosexual character has been continually marked by his or her sexuality (Bordo, 1999, p.157)

Even more than what is depicted in mass media, what is happening socially needs to be examined. When a boy is not acting enough like a straight boy should act, he is called a name, such as a homo, pussy, fag or a girl. When a girl is not acting enough like a straight girl, she is called a dyke, butch or manly. All of these words are used to reinforce the notion that men and women are straight, therefore boys and girls are straight. If you do not follow a certain role, then your sexual identity will be questioned, you will be questioned through these social reinforcements. The categories of heterosexuality and homosexuality for men/boys and women/girls have defined traits, attributes and roles that go with each. Gender roles, roles that are aligned to people based on one’s sex, reestablishing heterosexuality on a continual basis, is the current state of heterosexuality. In the books *Masculinities* by R.W. Connell, he writes about how the term heterosexuality changed the image of masculinity:

From the point of view of hegemonic masculinity, the potential for homoerotic pleasure was expelled from the masculine and located in a deviant group, symbolically assimilated to women or to beasts. There was no mirror-type of ‘the heterosexual’. Rather, heterosexuality became a required part of manliness (Connell, 1995, p.196).

The same could be said for the requirements of women and femininity. Women who are aligned to other women, not men, are seen as less of a woman. Unable to “get a man”, deemed an old maid, someone people should feel sorry for, unfeminine. Heterosexuality is a rigid system that has been institutionalized all around us, using gender roles as expectations for behavior. Reinforced throughout society by religion, education, history, television, movies, books, music, laws, just to name a few. Think about ways in which heterosexuality is reinforced as the dominant social norm on a daily basis. To understand the hold of heterosexuality we must look at what continues the need for heterosexuality. Gender roles play a huge part in the furthering of heterosexuality.

Gender Roles and Heterosexuality

Gender roles in the simplest explanation are the roles aligned to men and women based on masculinities (male traits) and femininities (female traits): “Masculinity and femininity are socially desirable attributes that are stereotypically considered to differentiate males and females (Spence and Helmreich, 1978)”(Galambos, Almeida, Petersen,1990, p.1906). To understand gender roles, one first must understand the dichotomy of masculinity/femininity. If to be masculine one has to be aggressive, strong, dominant, then to be feminine one has to be timid, soft, and supportive. They are

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